

The Year Of Delight (1921)



Margaret Widdemer



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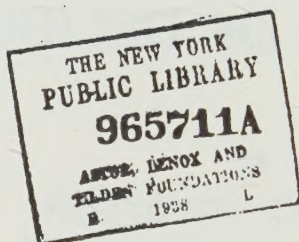
BY

MARGARET WIDDEMER

AUTHOR OF "I'VE MARRIED MARJORIE," "THE
BOARDWALK," "THE ROSE-GARDEN HUSBAND,"
"THE WISHING-RING MAN," ETC.

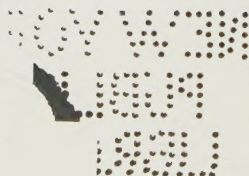


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TO
E. K. AND B. F. S.
UNCONSCIOUS VICTIMS OF MY QUEST
FOR A HERO AND HEROINE

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THE YEAR OF DELIGHT




THE YEAR OF DELIGHT

CHAPTER I

THE principal thing they trained you to at the Mary Lebaron Endowed School for the Orphans of Clergymen was to be good, which meant that you did as you were told. The training, if kind, was thorough; you knew how when they were through with you. But even at ten it sometimes occurred to Delight Lanier to wonder whether the rest of the world was going to find you as lovable as you wanted it to, with only goodness for capital. The princesses in the fairy books, besides having unattainable long golden hair, never worried much about obedience, and their ideas about being good were far from those explained to the Mary Lebaron Orphans of Clergymen.

Yet they seemed very popular in their own circles But of course, being in books, they couldn't be taken for proof. Anything might happen in a book; which was a matter for thankfulness, because nothing ever did at the Mary Lebaron.

It was meeting Gloria Jackson at the garden-party which finally convinced Delight of the inadequacy of her own social equipment.



You see, the Mary Lebaron School was not actually an orphanage. It was an endowed residential school run on the lines of Girard College. The little girls had governesses, not teachers, and straight neat plaits behind round combs, instead of cropped heads. They were taken to religious garden-parties up at St. John's Cathedral Grounds once every year in a well-drilled crocodile, just like other boarding-schools.

And if you saw a Mary Lebaron little girl all alone she wouldn't look to you particularly uniformed. A pair—well, even then they might be quaintly dressed, staid little daughters of some remote clerical home. They were clad in gray alpaca frocks a little curiously cut; plaited skirts, long waists with little pouchings in front, bretelles, long sleeves, and you could have your choice as to whether you were trimmed in black or red braid, so you weren't *quite* in a uniform. Delight used to hope that perhaps the dresses' reason for existence was that they were what little long-dead Mary Lebaron, the child in whose memory the school had been endowed, had worn. But Delight never discovered whether this was true or not. She was afraid to ask, for fear it should not be true.

When the crocodile of little Mary Lebaron girls

filed into the Cathedral grounds Delight's heart beat very hard. She felt frightened and happy, and at the same time a little like going home. She had felt that way for the four years that she had been taken to the annual garden-party. Sometimes nothing much happened—then you could be happy, for there was lots of room to go straying off alone and be what Delight called to herself the “lovely kind of lonely.” There was also the blessed certitude of ice-cream and cake, as well as an almost certain rose-and-violet sunset. Even the thunderstorm year had been fun, with everybody running and giggling, and huddling together inside the cloisters. That had had a nice feeling of *belonging* to it; the way everybody crouched close together and had fun over the ice-cream . . . almost nicer than a sunset. It was the dread of little girls, flamboyant, parented little girls in gay frocks, that made Delight apprehensive. They might taunt her with being an orphanage orphan, and really she wasn't. This had happened once to Rosalie Deforest. To be sure, the wise Rosalie had calmly presented her case to an opportune Bishop, and seen the impolite little girl led off the grounds in humiliated tears after the Bishop's kind rebuke; but there mightn't always be loose Bishops to administer high justice.

"Scatter now, children! Run and have as good a time as there is!" commanded Miss Maderson, the alert, slim young person who had brought them. "There'll be games here in half an hour. Don't stand about. 'I brought you here to be happy, and happy you have to be!'"

Delight smiled shyly up at Miss Maderson, who often made little jokes like that. . . . No, it really wasn't like being an orphan-asylum orphan.

She slid off obediently. Delight loved being alone. There wasn't any too much chance for it at the Mary Lebaron, even if you weren't one of the more popular little girls, whom the others tagged.

From year to year she did the same thing for a little while at the Cathedral garden-parties; walked happily away, feeling the sweet wind on her face, down an alley of very tall lilacs in the garden next door, till she came to her particular lilac bushes, where there was what the other girls, if they had known about it (but nobody did—nobody!), would have called a Bunk. It was a green nest of leaves between two bushes, hidden so that once in, not even a scrap of gray alpaca frock showed from outside. It was every bit her own. She went there to think, with no chance of being interrupted, about year-after-next.

At the Mary Lebaron there were bells, and lessons and playtimes, and with the best intentions in the world, if the governesses saw you sitting still staring out at space they were worried for fear you were ill or sulking or forgetting to study or play as much as you should. (But parents would have done that, doubtless, too, Delight assured herself.) Here between the lilac bushes, once a year, Delight spent a long wonderful half-hour with year-after-next, perfectly happy. No one would find her, no one would speak to her. Presently she would slip out, and make her way back to the place where the games were. She liked games, too; it was nice to feel the breathless squeezing of "Farmer-in-the-Dell," and the excitement of the dancing ring around her. It felt so friendly and belonging. And the lovely sliding, mournful melody of "London Bridge," with its half-understood words, always made her back thrill a little, and her eyes nearly fill with tears—

*"London Bridge is falling down,
My fair lady!"*

All this was ahead of her. Not forgetting the ice-cream, and perhaps fancy cakes. And for the pres-

ent—having gained her fortress—the story she told herself about the year-after-next.

Next year would have been a little sudden. No reasonable person would believe that wonderful things could happen to you as soon as next year. You pretty nearly knew what was going to happen then—you'd be in Blue Class under Miss Rider; you'd be in geometry and taking music. And if your voice was good, in the choir. But year-after-next was too far for anybody to tell you much about. It was all your own. Delight did not realize how much of her happiness was dependent on the glories of year-after-next, that impregnable fastness which nobody could take from her, that paradise which no one could mar. It was like the lilac-nook in that nobody knew it was there. And every year it slipped pleasantly ahead. It never made the mistake of turning into next year.

"Year-after-next," she told herself, "my hair will be much longer, all streaming down over my shoulders to my waist with a rose-colored bow tying it. And a beautiful girl will come along, all dressed in silk; only she'll have blue bows on her dress. And she'll say to me, 'I've wanted you for a best friend ever so long. Won't you show me how to make pictures out of fairy-tales with your china

dolls? I don't know how to do that.' And I'll say, 'Why, yes, I'd like to have you for a best friend.' And I'll put my china dolls in my pocket and go with her to the place where we really both belong. There'll be a big green field full of all sorts of flowers all around it. And we'll each have a key, just us. And the key will unlock a front door, and in the hall inside will be two skipping-ropes with handles, and bicycles. And a closet, locked, but we'll have the key, and every day we can go get a new thing to play with out of it. And she'll tell me about a telephone hanging up on the wall, and whenever we want more little girls to come play with us, lots of them, we just talk into it, and they'll come right over, very glad to. And sometimes little boys. There'll be people to do all the work for us, but we won't see them much, and they won't ever tell us what to do. We won't be doing anything wrong, so they won't have to. There will be one very loving lady that comes and kisses us, and put us to bed when we feel tired, and that we always know is there loving us. But she doesn't make us mind, because we aren't doing anything we shouldn't. . . ."

There were wonderful individual bedrooms in year-after-next, beribboned and draped and full of fairy-books that never had the same stories in for

long at a time. And some books, too, with endings of stories that Delight had read little bits of and never been able to find again. There was the end of the story of Princess Sad-My-Soul from the Brentano book—the story that in the real book had no end at all, because, the footnote said, the man who wrote it had got converted and only written hymns afterwards. There were lovely dresses, none of them gray. . . .

Year-after-next was much more real to Delight than the Mary Lebaron, though she did not realize it. It was year-after-next, not the excellent care and schooling she got, which made her go about with her look of dreamy content; which made her so docile and affectionate, and willing to have her pastors and masters do what they liked with her. It didn't much of it matter. If you did as they said carefully and quickly you would have more time to yourself, and you could slip into your year-after-next for a longer time than if you made a fuss about obeying. Everyone always loved you there. There was a little white kitten who sat on your knees, and a collie with devoted eyes, who guarded you wherever you went. The Best Friend had a dog too, a well-trained dog who never overturned the gorgeous walking doll, or the large doll's house, completely

furnished and containing in its parlor a tiny piano which could really be played upon. But *your* dog loved you, and you only. He saved you once, from a burglar, and another thrilling time from being drowned. (Delight should really have understudied him with a St. Bernard for this, but she was never a person who could scatter her affections very widely. And it wasn't as if he were a real dog. Year-after-next people found nothing a trouble.)

She was just unlocking a lovely gilded door that she had never before known was there, with a new key she had found on the ring. She had planned what should be behind it, nearly—a flight of downward steps leading to a swimming-pool. She had unbraided her thick, gold-shot, wavy hair, and was making herself feel as if it was waist-long. Year-after-next had never been more delightful. And then somebody gave the hiding branches a decisive jerk apart, and stood staring down at her. It was a little girl about her own age, or perhaps older. And, as Delight thought with a catching of breath that was half terror, she was something like the Best Friend. Only she did not look quite Best-Friendly in her eyes. Rather inquisitive and proud instead, and as if she ruled several grown people. She was

unquestionably a little girl with parents. Her hair, in an era of bobbing, was bobbed rather long and curled in a bush. Her dress was a pink taffeta, elaborately made, and reinforced by pink silk stockings and a very elaborate hat. She was altogether proudly overdressed and very impressive, and Delight could see that she regarded the world as made for her convenience. But she was friendly enough.

"Thought I saw an orphan going this way," said the newcomer. "Gee, what a grand bunk! Most folks wouldn't have found you. What's your name?"

Delight stepped quickly from her palace, and wrapped herself in her dignity. "We are not orphans," she said. "It's an endowed school. My name is Delight."

"Mine's Gloria Jackson," said the little girl in pink taffeta. "Come on out. They sent me to round up the orphans for ice-cream. I suppose ice-cream is a regular treat to you, isn't it? But I didn't have to come. I don't have to do anything I don't want to. You do, don't you?"

Delight stepped from her lilac-nook. She began swiftly to rebraid her hair, hoping that her face showed nothing of the way Gloria was hurting her feelings. She had said as many as three things now

that any little girl should have known were rude. She was a kind of child Delight had never seen. The little girls who were occasionally shown through the Mary Lebaron were usually so polite that a wiser soul might have inferred previous coaching in what not to say.

She dropped into step beside Gloria, obeying the implied mandate of the powers that were, as usual. She looked at her out of the corner of her eyes. Gloria seemed good-natured enough. It wasn't meanness, just mannerlessness.

"Why don't you have to do anything you don't want to?" she inquired in her turn. "Haven't you anybody to make you?"

Gloria shook her head so hard that the crimped, flaring red bush vibrated violently.

"Got a father and mother, if that's what you mean. But I don't have to do what they say. My mother believes in self-expression."

"What does that mean?" asked Delight. In spite of Gloria's callousness, she was passionately fascinated by her. Oh, if only this beautiful and insolent creature would say, "I like you! I want you for my best friend!" Her luminous, sensitive little face, with its great gray-blue eyes, turned vividly on Gloria.

Gloria laughed, and gave a little frisk on the gravel.

"Means she goes to classes in child-study, and buys books that say she mustn't tell me what to do. The books say that it spoils my in—inative, or something like that. I read them all myself so I can tell her if she forgets. Idea is that if she lets me do as I like I'll be lots better than if I didn't when I grow up. I pick out all my own clothes. Aren't they pretty?"

"Yes indeed, they are," breathed Delight. "And can you have everything you want to eat—all the candy you want?"

"There's the doctor," Gloria conceded reluctantly. "He's a horrid interfering old thing. Once he spanked me because I screamed for candy when I had the measles. But Laura fired him. This one's better. He'd better be! But he interferes a lot, at that."

"Who is Laura?"

"Laura's my mother. I started to call her that when I was a little baby—most babies do, Aunt Jessie says—and she let me go on, of course. I call my father Bill. Most people think it's awful cute."

Delight looked at Gloria again, with even more admiration. She began to feel quite at ease with her.

"But what will you do when you grow up, if you haven't any good manners?" she asked.

Gloria took this, as Delight had felt she would, more as a compliment than otherwise.

"Get along better without 'em," she said proudly. "Pretty folks don't have to have manners, and you get lots more things if you just help yourself, anyhow. I'm going to be awful pretty and have heaps of beaux and treat 'em like dogs. You'll see! They'll like it. I have lots more fun this way, and I don't see why I shouldn't when I'm grown up! Manners are silly—they are just to give grown folks a pull over you, anyhow. Grown folks are awful pigs, most of 'em."

It was a new world that Gloria opened. Delight's own paradise had never gone beyond a dream of being hidden away from authority. But this wonderful creature in pink taffeta actually lived on earth in a world which she ruled. Delight recognized sorrowfully that even if someone adopted her out of the Mary Lebaron, someone who bought books on child-study and lived up to them as Gloria's Laura did, she could never become the queen-regnant Gloria was. Manners were bitten into her too deeply. She would be polite to the end of her days.

"But if you meet other children who have in-native—was that it?" Gloria nodded. "And they want to be it too, what do you do?"

"Fight," said Gloria proudly. "I've got that kind of individuality. If I can't have my way I won't play. I scratched my cousin last year so it made a mark all down her face."

They had reached the place on the grass where the ice-cream was being served, now. Little Mary Lebaron girls in gray were dotted all over the grass sedately, with the sprinkling of parti-colored parented children among them. Ice-cream was being passed, and—yes—fancy cakes. Gloria pulled Delight down on the grass beside her.

"Here's an orphan that hasn't any ice-cream," she shrieked to a passing girl with a tray, jerking at her pretty skirt violently.

The girl made some remark under her breath which did not sound like admiration of the individualized child, but gave them the cream just the same. Gloria then demanded, always in the name of orphanhood, fancy cakes, and bestowed them, too, royally on Delight.


Delight ate thoughtfully. It was undoubtedly true that life yielded up more if you shrieked for it rudely. But she saw very plainly that shrieking

was not for her. It did too much violence to her natural desire to be courteous. Perhaps—perhaps year-after-next she might demand her rights as Gloria did. . . . Though she knew she wouldn't.

The garden-party swung its way through the accustomed channels after that. Ice-cream was always its grand highest point. There were more games—she had missed the first set—and she went dreamily through them, Gloria always at her side. Gloria felt Delight's unmixed admiration and liked it. Many children found things unadmirable in Gloria, being egotists of her sort themselves. At the day's end, when the Mary Lebaron girls were marshaled again in the crocodile, Delight felt Gloria crowding through the drawn-up lines to speak to her.

"I like you, Delight," she called. "If you weren't an orphan I'd take you for a best friend."

It hurt—much of what Gloria said was likely to hurt a sensitive little girl who didn't like being called an orphan—but it thrilled and dazzled, too. . . . There was still a subdued excitement at the Mary Lebaron School when they got home; and a good deal of whimpering from the smaller and more easily tired of the girls. Delight soothed and helped put the primaries to bed, and finally crawled into



her own dormitory cot, wide-awake and tingling. She slipped back into year-after-next as soon as the light was out. And going through the golden halls of the house in her domain, hand-in-hand with her, was Gloria in pink silk—a Gloria who explained that she had been misinformed when she called Delight an orphan; and who asked humbly to be Delight's Best Friend.

"I didn't know you had a place like this, and wonderful clothes. They're as pretty as mine," Gloria said. "And your dog is better."

"I'll show you my swimming-pool," Delight said drowsily, and slipped off to sleep. . . .

The Best Friend in the land of year-after-next was always Gloria after that. Year-after-next continued to be a shadow companion of the real years for Delight, though she grew older and taller, and the braids of her wavy hair grew even longer than she hoped they would. She was responsible and docile still, as thirteen and fourteen and fifteen came along. The Heads of Mary Lebaron discussed her; a dear girl, they said. Miss Rider, who did not approve of institutions, though she earned her living by one, was wont to point her out as an example of

what institutions did to girls. "She has no initiative, not even a saving discontent, Miss Maderson ! She doesn't even have adorations." Miss Maderson lifted one eyebrow mockingly at Miss Rider, who was accustomed to being the object of "crushes."

"Oh, that isn't it!" she defended herself, coloring. "I don't need to have her adore me. She likes me well enough. It's only that she doesn't seem to have any place to put her feelings. Sometimes I think she hasn't any feelings or any interests, just sweetness and docility."

"And intelligence."

"Oh, yes, she's intelligent, and she has attraction. You can't help remembering her and discussing her. The girls would love her instead of liking her if she were a little less of a Lady of Shalott."

"That's it. We both feel that all the feelings and capacities are *there*. You proved you did by calling her that."

"I suppose it's her face," said Miss Rider defensively, poking Miss Maderson's private hearth-fire. "You can't conclude that a girl who looks like the 'Soul's Awakening,' and has features that express something different every minute you look at her, is without feeling because she never does anything with it. That's what makes me say she is

institutionalized. If she'd had a little brother and sister to fuss over, or parents or even an aged grandmother . . ."

Miss Maderson laughed. "A chance to be naughty is what you mean."

"Well," said the other teacher defiantly, "I do. Individually naughty. She's too gentle for the molding influences of an institution. They mold her too much. Milly Keith, now . . ."

They both laughed. Milly Keith was the school imp, a riotous, red-cheeked fly-away whom Dotheboys Hall would have had a hard time subduing.

"I suppose we ought to be grateful for Delight's virtues and charms, instead of wishing she was insubordinate," summed up Miss Maderson.

"It's only for her own sake. I wish she had a little more chance to be a human being," Miss Rider ended; and then they passed on to Milly Keith, who was by way of being a Problem, and incited little schoolmates to make raids on neighboring cherry-orchards—for the Mary Lebaron was wisely placed outside the city limits.


Delight did not know that people ever thought of her or discussed her. No more than they knew that without her dream-world she would have been passionately unhappy, perhaps as insubordinate as

Miss Rider's wildest dreams could imagine. The truth was, she had to be happy, and the Mary Lebaron could not give her the affection and liberty necessary to her happiness. Year-after-next, with its beautiful things and loving people and fairy-tale fantasies, unrivaled by anything that ever really happened, became a solid country that might have been around the corner.

Of course it did not remain static. The skipping-ropes turned into ponies, and Gloria's pink taffeta changed its cut with the years. The lady who was very loving did not put them to bed any longer, though she was still to be found sewing on the broad lawns, and waiting to welcome them home from parties.

Delight never looked forward to what was really going to happen—year-after-next masked it too effectually. So one day when she was nearer eighteen than seventeen, and the matron came up to where she was showing a younger girl how to tidy her bureau drawers, informing her that there was a visitor for her, she was faintly surprised, but not excited.

"I didn't know I had anybody to visit me," she wondered, as she straightened up from the drawers and turned.



"An old lady. Your cousin."

Delight smoothed her hair and straightened a frock that was already neat, and went sedately downstairs without asking any questions. But her heart was beating wildly. Was it coming at last—all the lovely life she had thought about so long? Then she reined herself in. She had never heard of this cousin. Perhaps it was a mistake. Or even if it was not, what would an old lady, a cousin who had never come to see her before, do toward giving her the gay girl-life she wanted? It was pleasant to have a visitor, anyway.

She greeted the stout, important-looking old lady who sat with an effect of being enthroned on the largest chair the reception room afforded, with the rather old-fashioned courtesy they taught at the Mary Lebaron. She found herself being regarded with a certain approval.

"You have the manners of a lady," said this alarming old person. "I didn't know they taught them in orphanages. They've gone out everywhere else. Sit down, I want to ask you some questions. I have to find out if you'll do."

"Do for what?" Delight wondered. She sat down, obedient, eyeing the old lady shyly. She had so hoped that this old cousin would be someone she

could be fond of; and she seemed a difficult person for the attempt.

"What do you know?" demanded the cousin, who was anonymous as yet. Delight wondered when she would find out her name. The question too, was rather a sweeping one. Should she start, Delight wondered, at her list of school studies? Or did she mean household accomplishments or general information—or worldly wisdom?

"I've—I've studied what we all study here," she answered, rather at sea.

"You're neat, I see," said the cousin, taking her in through a pair of gold-rimmed spectacles, as if she were a Point of Interest. "What about stenography and typewriting?"

"Oh, the secretarial course? Yes, I've had that," Delight answered, smiling at her questioner with pleasure at having found the right answer at last.

"Your teachers say you're docile. Now I need someone to live with me, someone who will give me a decent amount of gratitude for what I do for her. A girl that's been brought up in an orphan asylum ought to be able to feel that. I think I'll take you."

Take her? Delight could feel already the oppression of the old cousin's dominating personality; the ruthless personality of a rich old lady who

knows she can be as rude as she likes, because her relatives need what she can do for them more than they feel the need of a sense of independence. She wanted to cry out that she would not be taken—that she wanted to be left alone at the Mary Lebaron, to her dreamy, solitary life, not flung into the power of somebody who could hurt her feelings whenever she wished. And yet there was no reasonable excuse for refusing. She could see that. She looked appealingly at Miss Rider.

“You see, Delight, you’d have to take a position in another year, anyway,” Miss Rider said in answer to the appealing glance. “And it would be better for you to be with Mrs. Denegar than in the business world. You would like it better than an office.”

Delight was not so sure. An office—with busy breezy people coming and going; with its atmosphere of realness and aliveness and the feeling it would give of being in the midst of things—she thought it would be very nice indeed. And then—the unaccustomed pleasure and adventure of thinking everything out for yourself, instead of having to remember to do everything some other person’s way when so often your way really might have been as good. It seemed to her that Mrs. Denegar was

not a likely person to let you plan things your own way. She did not want to go live with her, that was all there was about it. But there seemed no question in anybody's mind on that point. Here was the cousin who wanted a docile stenographic relative, here was the docile stenographic relative. What more, thought her teachers—she could see them thinking it—could be wished?

"May I discuss it with you, Miss Rider?" she asked appealingly.

"We have already discussed nearly everything about it, my dear," said Miss Rider. "But if there are any details you would like to speak to me about, I am sure Mrs. Denegar will have no objections."

Mrs. Denegar laughed—rather a jolly laugh.

"Not the least in the world. Talk it over, child," she said. Delight felt less afraid of her and as if it wouldn't be so bad to go. Just the same she felt an inward conviction that though Mrs. Denegar might be jolly with *her*, she might not like Delight to be familiar back. And that seemed hardly fair.

CHAPTER II

SHE went out with Miss Rider into the next room, one of the schoolrooms.

"Do I have to go, Miss Rider?" she demanded point-blank.

"It seems to me that you would be very foolish to refuse, Delight," Miss Rider told her. "Mrs. Denegar is a very rich and well-known woman. I had no idea she was a relative of yours—nor, it appears, had she, until lately. She does a great deal of Americanization work. She is on several of the boards that our directors are on."

"Was that how she came to find out about me? What relation is she to me really?" asked Delight, who felt Mrs. Denegar's net closing about her. And, she couldn't explain, of course, that it seemed such an unlikely place for year-after-next!

"Your mother's first cousin," explained Miss Rider, taking the last question first, "and I was going to tell you that it came about through her meeting Miss Maderson at the meeting of the Board of Directors of Homes. She spoke of you. Delight Lanier is such an unusual name that Mrs. Denegar

was quite sure that you were her cousin's child."

"Yes, I was named for my mother," Delight said ineffectively. Then she burst out:

"Oh, Miss Rider, isn't there *any* way of my getting out of it?"

Miss Rider looked at her in surprise. It was the first time Delight had ever burst out about anything.

"Why, my dear?" she asked.

Delight gave her the simple truth.

"Because I don't see how she could ever get to care for me. She would never be anyone I could really love, or who would really love me. Oh, Miss Rider, suppose you'd been brought up without anybody on earth that you could really feel cared for *you*,—why, even when I was a little girl and they said Jesus loved me, when I asked they had to admit that He loved everybody else in the world just as much. I'd go live with an old dog if it would love *me*! But this Mrs. Denegar *can't*. She loves having her own way, and ruling over people and pretending it's for their own good. And it isn't. It's for her fun. I can see, by the way she talked to me. And she calls me an orphan—"

Delight burst into tears.

"I'm afraid you will have to go with her," said

Miss Rider. "You see, the Mary Lebaron is for daughters of clergymen who have no other means of support. We have no other position in view for you. And your cousin is willing to look after you. We haven't any choice, dear child."

Delight dried her eyes. Of course, if they hadn't any choice neither had she. She pulled herself together, and followed Miss Rider back into the reception room.

"Details all right?" asked Mrs. Denegar with a smile which seemed to indicate that naturally they would be—if they knew they had the good luck to be details belonging to *her*. Delight could see that she was one of those people who ran events. Events never ran her. She gave them no chance.

"All right, thank you," said Delight. "How soon do you want me to come?"

"That's a good girl! Why,—let me see. I could take you along now. You can't wear orphan-asylum uniforms in my house, naturally, so all you need to take is underwear. No use my spending my money on that. It will cost me enough to fit you out with suitable clothing as it is," said Mrs. Denegar, with her cheerful disregard of Delight's feelings.

"I *don't* like her! I don't! I don't!" said Delight passionately over and over to herself, as she folded up her underwear, and tucked neatly into the corners of her suitcase such personal belongings as were hers. She had as few as a nun, but she loved them, from the china dolls she had been given once at Christmas to the little blue "Winifred; or After Many Days," that had been her last birthday present. Usually they gave you useful birthday presents that, while you were glad to get them, wore out—belts and stockings and such-like. This had been a perfectly useless gift, she had always suspected at the instigation of Miss Rider. All her own.

It did not take long. In ten minutes she was down again, quiet and neat, with her suitcase in her hand.

"I'm ready, Mrs. Denegar," she said.

"Cousin Augusta, child. I was your poor mother's first cousin. Come on now. I expect a ride in a motor will be a treat, won't it?"

Delight made a little prayer under her breath:

"Oh, Lord, please don't let me mind it! Let me like her, for if I don't I'll be dreadfully unhappy!" and as she meant it very sincerely found herself smiling, and saying, quite honestly, "Naturally, we

don't often have motor rides. I shall like it very much."

And she *did* like it—little as she enjoyed Cousin Augusta's good-tempered rudeness and calm assumption that people had to take from her anything that she chose to say, because she was a benefactress. She was like old aunts with money in English novels—Delight had never realized that such people were real.

"Anyway, I am going to be able to study the manners of the rich and great," she thought with a little smile. And anyway, it was a change. And maybe—maybe year-after-next was still where it had always been! Delight's happy heart that *would* always enjoy itself secretly with a half-chance, pride and humility that it always had to struggle with notwithstanding, gave a little throb of pleasure as they got into the big, luxurious car side by side, and Cousin Augusta gave lordly directions to the chauffeur. It occurred to Delight suddenly that perhaps Cousin Augusta hadn't always been rich. She didn't take it for granted enough.

It was pleasant to stop at a big department store and have clothes bought for her with a free hand. Cousin Augusta got enthusiastic, indeed, and

bought more than she had intended, as she said ruefully when they got back into the car.

"I've spent a lot more on you than I should. Dear me—I didn't realize what I was doing. Well—well—I suppose you need them."

"You might return the ones you didn't intend to get," suggested Delight quietly.

But Cousin Augusta didn't care about that. The pleasure of grumbling had been really the point. She vetoed any idea of returning them. And Delight was secretly glad, for they *were* nice clothes; and none of them gray.

Discreet garments they were; very secretarial in appearance; but they weren't uniform—they were all Delight's, hers individually. And even if an evening frock is black and simple it is a portent and a wonder, if you've never had one before.

"You're to eat with me unless there's company," Cousin Augusta laid down the law.

Delight had fallen by now into her usual quietness of speech and manner. She liked the house she entered, even if Cousin Augusta did tell her that she supposed she had never seen anything like it. As a matter of fact she never had, and said so. She was beginning to feel the old lady less than she had; and after a day or so Cousin Augusta and the big


house and noiseless maids faded into a background for her own world again.

After all it was rather like school once more; she took dictation and wrote letters and telephoned to people on Boards about deserving cases, till three or so in the afternoon. After that she was her own mistress; subject to cross-questionings.

But Cousin Augusta soon found that Delight's was an eventless and a blameless life. She had no way of making friends of her own age, because most of the people she saw were middle-aged or elderly; once in a while she slipped out to a *matinée*, which she reported dutifully, her quiet words giving no clue to the wild delight it had given her.

Perhaps if she had asked for more, more would have been given her. If she had said once, "Cousin Augusta, I'm young and full of desire to get something out of life and youth. Help me to have young friends—help me to have good times once in a while!" Mrs. Denegar might have done it.

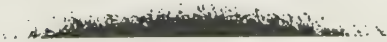
She enjoyed benefactions, and if she had thought for once in a way that it would be doing good to her young secretary-relative to introduce her to some young people, or perhaps give a little party for her even, she would unquestionably have done



it—reminding Delight, of course, of her own nobility in the act the while, but doing it lavishly none the less. But to speak of such things never dawned on Delight. It did not occur to her that anyone would ever give her anything for the asking. Nobody ever had. . . .

But on the lawns of the house in year-after-next there were wonderful tennis-courts, and little summer-houses out of an English novel, and a ballroom where musicians played every night, and in and through them all went Delight, in gay frocks, brilliant, laughing, conquering, with girl friends about her, and lovers following close. The lady who loved her very much, smiling and silver-haired, sat on the lawns, or chaperoned her lovingly on the dances and the wild rides and excursions that she and her suite took sometimes on moonlight nights. Gloria Jackson, too, was still her best friend, still in the pink frocks and the bush of curled red hair. And as for her hero . . .

She had lived three years with Cousin Augusta before she saw him. She was very much the same at twenty-one as she had been at eighteen; taller and paler, and with a heavier weight of gold-brown hair,



which was more than ever her pride, and which she wore crownwise over her forehead. For all she knew she might live there, neither happy nor unhappy, till the braids turned gray.

One night after she had finished the contents of a tray upstairs, and was sitting at her window planning a dinner-party, she heard Cousin Augusta's ring. There was a real dinner-party downstairs; indeed, it was what had suggested the one at her own house to her. Only hers was a decided improvement on Cousin Augusta's, which she understood was mainly composed of relatives. She was probably reminding such of them as she had lately succored of the fact, in a loud, clear, cheerful voice. There was doubtless a celebrity or two of the heavier and more good-doing sort for balance. And Delight had had the only really worthy part of the function, the meal itself, on her pretty tray upstairs. She was just finishing the mousse now as she sat at the window, in one of those moods of languid, reasonless happiness which come when you're young without any excuse whatever.

She rose obediently and ran down the stairs to the dining-room, pausing a little shyly at the door. She made a very graceful picture as she stood there poised for the moment, with her loose, heavy-woven

gold-brown braids wrapping her head like a crown, and making her pale face and great gray-blue eyes look more ethereal and flowerlike than usual. Cousin Augusta beckoned her over and sent her upstairs again for a long new report. The visiting celebrity wanted to see it. Delight was just murmuring, "Yes, Cousin Augusta," and turning back to go after it, when a man lower down the table sprang up unceremoniously with a "Oh, say, Aunt Augusta, let me! I know where your desk is! "

Before Mrs. Denegar could veto it the speaker was around at Delight's side, looking down at her with the gayest and friendliest of smiles, and mounting to Mrs. Denegar's sitting-room side by side with Delight before anybody could say anything.

She looked at him shyly as she searched the desk for the report. He was not a great deal older than she was—twenty-three at the most—with brown eyes that seemed to laugh whether he did or not, and loose brown hair that he tossed back from his forehead with a little fling of the head every few minutes. He had scarcely said a word before Delight knew that she liked him very much. He gave you a feeling—it wasn't what he said so much as a radiation from him—that he was having a glorious

time out of life, and you were partly what made it so glorious. He made you feel warm and alive.

"Here we are!" he said. "Oh, I say, it's a shame for you to have to come all the way downstairs again just for that. Let me take it. Aunt Augusta can't bite either of us for that!"

"I think perhaps I'd better," said Delight quietly.

"Tell me, are you some relation of mine?" he demanded. "Why, you must be; you called her Cousin Augusta. I'm her youngest sister's son, Julian Leroy. Silly name—Julian. You aren't—" his eyes danced—"you aren't an aunt by any chance? I make an excellent nephew!"

"I'm her secretary. She always speaks of me that way before people, that's why you've never heard of me before. My name is Lanier, and my mother was her first cousin. I haven't been with her long. She came and dug me out of what was very nearly an orphanage—she'd call it so to you."

Julian Leroy only laughed again. He was evidently not a snob, for he didn't seem to care whether it was an orphanage or an Old Ladies' Home that Delight had been digged from.

"She would," he agreed gaily. "She'd call it a baby farm if she thought you didn't want her to."

It's just Aunt Augusta's little way—she feels she was born to keep the world in its place, most especially the part of it that's related to her! She's an old dear, underneath, though, after you get past the point of minding whether she has any manners or not. Bill says it's being the only rich one in a big family. She does such an awful lot for us—she has to get something back! ”

“It's all very well for you,” said Delight warningly, “she can't tell you what she thinks of you for keeping the report away from Dr. Danielson. There's a tableful of people. But she can me tomorrow morning, and I think she will.”

Julian turned and dived for the door at her warning.

“Can't she! ” he called back. “She's giving the dinner in honor of my engagement, and she's just been telling old Danielson what a promising youth I am. Just the time for her to express herself! ”

He waved the report at her, and was clattering down the stairs like a flash. Delight turned and went up the next flight, slowly and softly. She felt as if she were going up out of the sunlight. He was engaged. Of course he was engaged. Anybody who liked people as much as he did couldn't well not be. The pretty, plump, back-slit girl in the

yellow frock with a single red rose at her corsage, the one next to him, must be the one he was going to marry. Yes—she remembered now, dimly, something Cousin Augusta had said about “my nephew Julian.”

She never expected to see him again, or only casually. But he had been a flash of sunlight in her life, as he was in that of most people he came across, for the matter of that. And she wished he *hadn't* told her he was engaged. She didn't quite know why; only it spoiled things, ever so little.

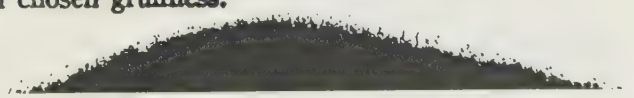
She went back to her window, and to the mousse, which was not quite melted yet. She ate it slowly and appreciatively, as she went on thinking. Why—his being engaged to the black-eyed girl didn't really matter. In year-after-next he needn't be, and it was only in year-after-next that she would ever know him well. On the green lawns of her own domain he could laugh and talk to her; he could belong to her and nobody else. . . . They could be the closest and gayest of friends. . . . She was driving down a little moonlit road in summer, a country night, all scented with flowers, with black shadows lacing the path ahead. She was dressed in a fluttering rose-colored gown. Gloria, beside her, was, for once, in blue. The night was full of excite-

ment and laughter. And on the lawn of a cottage by the road she heard one man call to another, laughing, and she knew the voices; they were Julian and the somebody he called "Bill." In this country it didn't matter whether you should do things or not; they were all right if you wanted to do them. She leaned forward and called to both of them to get in with her and Gloria, and go driving down the moonlight for hours. They sprang in, and all four of them went on in a gust of happiness through the moonlight. There was some wonderful place ahead of them, Delight was not certain what. . . .

Presently she went to bed. But even after she was asleep she went on dreaming.

There was little to mark the time after that. She did not see Julian again; he came to see Cousin Augusta, but Delight was never sent for when he was there.

But she grew thinner and paler. Not because she was unhappy. It just seemed to happen. And when the doctor came to look over Cousin Augusta, with whom he always quarreled gruffly, he noticed Delight, fluttering in and out, caught her, and looked her over thoroughly. He was so famous that he had to be extremely polished or very gruff, and he had chosen **gruffness**.



Cousin Augusta tried to protest, but the doctor barked at her and went on examining Delight at the foot of the mahogany bed, Cousin Augusta watching from under a highly ruffled boudoir cap that made her look rather like the pictures of the Old Woman who lived in a Shoe. The doctor, always gruffly, went over Delight inch by inch. He strapped something around her arm and took her blood pressure; he used a stethoscope, and stuck needles in her finger to test something he called hemoglobin; and when he got through, Delight felt as if she had been hard at work for a half-day.

"Well, what's she dying of?" demanded Cousin Augusta brusquely, when he had done.

"She's anemic," said the doctor even more brusquely. She needs less confinement. More young society. Do you happen ever to give your secretary any pleasure, in the course of your benefactions?"

"Pleasure? She's perfectly happy," said Cousin Augusta. "Aren't you, Delight? And a good girl too."

Delight smiled faintly at the unexpected praise.

"Oh, yes, I'm perfectly happy," she said in her dreamy voice. Everything seemed more shadowy than usual today. She was so tired. Cousin Au-

gusta wasn't real enough to be unhappy about. Nothing was very real, as a matter of fact. She smiled at the doctor, staggered a little, put out her hand, and fainted neatly on a chair.

Cousin Augusta was shrilly demanding the reasons for it all when she came to.


"Anemia," said the doctor again curtly. "Fainting is one of the symptoms. Send her away for a change of air, with an amusing companion. Keep her outdoors. I should say all her strength had gone into that mop of hair. I suppose it grows all the time, doesn't it, child?"

Delight, laid out on the floor, with her plaits loosened about her, nodded faintly. It had grown like a weed lately; till it was far below her knees.

"Better shorten those braids and thin them out," went on the doctor, "and go outdoors and stay there."

Delight smiled a little at the idea of doing either.

"I'll leave her some iron and stuff, but you've got to take better care of her, Mrs. Denegar," he concluded, helping Delight up gently enough. "As for you, you want to cut out using your brain for the next six months. Causes will be a lot better off if you live after that than if you work for 'em till



September and then die of apoplexy. You're apoplectic and she's anemic—overwork on causes. Women have no idea of moderation."

He snorted and walked out of the bedroom, leaving Delight eyeing her employer with a certain feeling of apology for having fainted.

"That man doesn't know what he is talking about," said Cousin Augusta with indignation, flouncing up on her pillows. "We've both eaten something that we shouldn't. That's all there is to that."

She settled back on her pillows again, triumphantly, though she was flushed and panting.

"Well, if it's indigestion," she went on calmly, "we'll be worse tomorrow. Delight, you'd better go get your pad and take some dictation while we're both able to work."

Delight rose obediently. She did not feel much the worse for her faint. She went for her pad and took six highly important letters. At the beginning of the seventh she quietly fainted again.

The next thing she knew, Dora, the parlormaid, was fussing over her with ammonia. Dora was, to a certain degree, Mrs. Denegar's personal maid also. Delight had only been faint for a minute.


"You'd better go to bed," said Cousin Augusta, not unkindly. So Delight smiled and went. She *was* terribly tired.

There was no summoning bell from Cousin Augusta's room the next morning after breakfast. Delight was up and dressed, feeling about the same as usual. She ate her breakfast and typed her letters, and wondered why there was nothing for her to do. It was quite eleven before the bell rang.

Cousin Augusta apparently hadn't changed her position since seven the night before. She still sat propped in a burrow of pillows with the voluminously ruffled cap and pink bed-gown—you couldn't call it a dressing sacque—of the Old Woman in the Shoe. She signed her letters, and then directed Delight to sit down on the bed by her.

"The doctor's been here again," she said. "He insists that you have anemia badly. Well, I suppose I've got to nurse you. He made me promise, on my own account as well as yours, that I'd stop work for a while. I don't know what the Board will do . . . I always did hate people who got sick when I did. Move up nearer to me, Delight. No, facing the way you are."

Delight, obediently backed up to the old lady, felt her cousin's *thick, efficient, old fingers* pulling



out the four heavy shell hairpins that held up her ropes of hair. Instinctively she jerked away, remembering what the doctor had said about her having her hair thinned. It was the most beautiful thing she had—she knew that well—and she loved the murmur of admiration that she sometimes heard over it, when her Cousin Augusta was having committees of women. She didn't want those unbelievably thick braids thinned till they were no heavier than anybody else's hair—than the knot of black curls Julian's fiancée had worn, say.

"Sit still," said Cousin Augusta sharply, not offering to unbraid her hair. The habit of obedience was strong. Delight sat still and then sprang up with a shriek—for Cousin Augusta had crunched her heavy shears straight through one hanging plait at the nape of her neck, and the short unbraided ends flew against her neck and cheek. She flung herself down and began to cry uncontrollably.

"Oh, my hair! my hair! Oh! how could you be so cruel?"

"Be quiet, and sit up," said Cousin Augusta severely. "You'll have to let me cut the other plait off. You can't go round with one side off and the other side on, like my son John. Come back here."

Still sobbing, Delight crouched by the bed.

Cousin Augusta rang for Dora, kind, middle-aged Dora, who was one of those servants you can't be indecorous before.

"Dora, finish cutting Miss Delight's hair, as the doctor ordered," Delight heard her say.

"Come now, Miss Delight, you can't go against the doctor. And anyway it's sure to grow out again soon. Sit up, there's a good girl," said Dora's steady voice persuasively.

For very shame's sake, Delight did as she was bid. She sat up submissively, while Dora cut evenly through the other braid, and brushed out the short hair remaining.

"It's so thick she'll have to wear a comb to hold it back," she heard Dora say, and go in search of the article she spoke of. She sat still and crushed, while the maid returned, brushed her hair back from her face and fastened it with a round comb like the one of her Mary Lebaron days. Then Dora went out and Delight rose heavily to follow her.


"Come back," said Cousin Augusta. "You're behaving like a baby. What earthly difference can it make to you whether your hair is long or short, if it's a means to your getting well?"

Delight turned, at bay at last.

"I'll tell you what it meant to me," she said, with

a hardness in her voice that Cousin Augusta had never heard before. "It was the only thing I had that gave me any pleasure. I am young, and I'm absolutely without anybody to love me—anybody to care whether I'm happy or unhappy. I was just one of a hundred little girls that were looked after by charity at the Mary Lebaron. I'm just a convenience to you—your secretary, that you consider less than your maids. I've never had a chance to be pretty, or dressed like other girls. You could have given me a chance besides board meetings if you'd wanted to. You could have liked me a little. But nobody ever has, much. I suppose there's nothing in me to like or be kind to. And my hair *was* lovely. It was longer and thicker than anybody's I ever saw, and a pretty color. I loved it. I could always take it down and look at it and think, 'Well, I have that anyway.' And now I haven't even that! I haven't anything! "

"Delight," Cousin Augusta said in a voice that was almost gentle. But Delight was too hysterical to notice or care. She fled sobbing to her room, where she lay across her bed and sobbed on, with the short, thick, half-curling ends of her hair loose and uncomfortable about her hot cheeks.



CHAPTER III

COUSIN AUGUSTA did not send for Delight again that day. You can't cry forever. After another hour's thorough weeping Delight sat up, pushed the hated round-comb back into her hair, and went to wash her face. She did not want to look at herself, but the bathroom mirror was where she had to. . . . It certainly hadn't improved her. Her great gray-blue eyes were nearly drowned with crying, and her face was stained and swollen. The delicate, distinguished look the crowning plaits had given was gone—the straight-back hair was wrong for her face. She tried parting it, but that was worse. Finally, in desperation, she pushed the comb in place again and sat down by her window.

After a while she felt better. . . . It would grow again. By year-after-next it would be as long as ever. And illogically, the thought of year-after-next brought Julian Leroy's gay, honest face, with its live look and the loose brown hair falling above it, vividly to her. The memory of her twenty minutes with him was like remembering some gay morning when everything was fresh winds and stim-

ulating sunlight. In spite of anemia and lost braids she smiled. Why . . . some day he might come to the house again and she speak to him—any time!

Presently she shook herself and went down to her typewriter and cleared up a lot of odds and ends that there had never been quite time for: unimportant letters which had been postponed from day to day by Cousin Augusta's orders. It was lunch-time when she was through. Dora, waiting at her solitary meal, bent to speak to her as she finished.


"Miss Delight, don't you want to go up and speak to Mrs. Denegar? You know she's very fond of you, and she's not as well this afternoon, it seems to me."

Delight looked at the maid with wide eyes of astonishment.

"Fond of me? . . . Why, Dora! . . . But of course I'll go! But she isn't. People aren't."

"Now, Miss Delight!" said Dora's soft voice chidingly, "everybody'd be, if you'd only let them. You live in a boxed-in place of your own, like. It's hard to get at you."

Delight felt as if the staid Angora cat had opened its pink mouth and talked to her. Why—Dora was human and kind—and she was suggesting that Cousin Augusta might be, too. And what Dora said



about the boxed-in place—she had never thought of that—could that be true? She smiled at Dora.

“I’ll try to get unboxed,” she said almost gaily, and ran up to see Cousin Augusta.

She did not look worse. The large red face against the proud frillings was redder than it had been instead of paler, as Delight had expected to see it. She went forward just the same.

“I’m sorry I cried so, and was so rude to you, Cousin Augusta,” she said frankly. “But you didn’t play fair with me, the way you cut off my hair.”

“You may well be sorry,” said Cousin Augusta grimly. “But you’re right,” she added with unexpectedness. “And I don’t know but there was something in what you said. There, go take a walk, child. I can’t work today, even if you can.”

Delight, very much surprised at herself for wanting to in the least, bent impulsively over and kissed the old lady before she went to hunt for a hat that would stay on her braidless head.

She wasn’t so much stared at, after all. The slim figure in dark blue serge, taking its demure constitutional daily, was familiar enough to habitual passers-by not to be investigated rudely.

She was always glad that she had gone up and

said that she was sorry to Cousin Augusta; because it was only three days later that Cousin Augusta died. It didn't seem like Cousin Augusta to be dead. Delight had a feeling that the old lady ought to be up, laying down the law for her own funeral, instead of lying still without a word or an order, and white instead of red and important. It was apoplexy, as the doctor had warned her. His order to stop work had been obeyed too late.

The doctor had remembered Delight, when they had found Cousin Augusta dead, and hastily summoned him. He had found time after making arrangements and summoning relatives, to go over his tiresome tests again with her. He had spoken approvingly of her good sense in cutting off her hair, in a way she did not understand.

"It will give you a better chance," were the queer words he used.

"A better chance of what?" Delight asked him; but he only patted her heavily, and said:

"I'll write you. Not certain about you yet."

There was a feeling of protection and comfort about the presence of the heavy, gruff old doctor, and she and Dora were sorry when he went.

Relatives came to look after things; well-dressed, weeping relatives who talked in low voices on the

stairs and at the table. They were nice to Delight; she had met some of them before. Julian Leroy did not come at all, though she hoped he would.

The funeral was planned by Cousin Augusta after all, only she had thoughtfully written down directions for it some years before. It was held in church. Representatives of more committees than Delight had ever thought existed sat in rustling rows behind the double row of relatives. Delight, under her heavy veil, caught sight of Julian Leroy and smiled impulsively at him. But he did not see her, and after the first hurt shock she remembered that a mourning veil is too thick to be seen through.

Afterwards she did not go back for the reading of the will. She hardly thought it likely that anything had been left her, and she had caught sight of Miss Maderson and Miss Rider among the Committee representatives. She wanted to ask them about getting another position. She had a good wardrobe, but very little money, for Cousin Augusta had never given her a salary; merely clothes and pocket-money. It was pleasant to see them again, though the dim feeling that she had had so much lately was stealing over as she talked to them. It seemed strange that they were so little different

all the years she had known them, while she had turned into a grown-up woman.

Miss Rider thought that she was almost sure of a place for Delight. It was a Board lady, who had known Cousin Augusta and seen Delight at work. The meeting with her old teachers, and the hope of work, cheered her and she walked home almost gaily. A change is a change, after all, when you are twenty-one.

Dora was watching in the hall for her when she got home, unusually solemn.

"Here's a letter for you, Miss Delight, and the lawyer's waiting to see you."

"The lawyer!" Delight felt a faint stirring of alarm. Did they want her to pack up that night and go away? Then she smiled a little. That was a silly idea. She paused shyly as she stood in the lighted doorway, and half carelessly opened and read the doctor's letter. She stiffened as she read it . . . she read it again. She stood there, dead-white, rigid in the doorway, hearing the lawyer's voice from a distance. He had to repeat what he said twice, before she understood it. She heard his voice get fussier and kinder, and a little closer to her, and finally she made out what he was saying.

"Don't take it as hard as that, my dear Miss

Lanier. Six million dollars is a great responsibility, but I am sure that Mrs. Denegar was right in believing that you were capable of using it worthily. . . ."

Delight, one hand at her throat, flung out the other, that grasped the doctor's letter, to steady herself against the door-jamb.

She began to laugh hysterically. "Six million dollars—six million dollars, and only a year to live!"

The lawyer stared at her aghast.

"The letter, the letter—" she gasped. "Per-
nicious anemia, the doctor says—look—I'll be dead
next year!"

The letter slipped from her fingers, as she slid down in a dizzy heap, against the wall. She could hear herself sobbing, as if it were somebody else far off, and as she felt Dora's arms go round that somebody, she heard the voice that sobbed, repeating:

"I've lost year-after-next! I haven't any year-after-next!"

When Delight came to Dora had tucked her into bed. She lay limply there, watching Dora as she sat at a distant window, stitching on some white thing. For a few minutes she could not remember.

Something had happened—something that would have been wonderful if a dreadful something else hadn't happened along with it. Finally she recollected. There wasn't any year-after-next any more; only this year. Not even next year. And for a year—just this year—she had all Cousin Augusta's money. It did not frighten her any more. She was too tired. It occurred to her that it was like a queer, practical joke. She spoke listlessly to Dora.

"If we'd known I was going to die anyway, Cousin Augusta needn't have cut off my nice hair, need she, Dora?" said Delight dreamily.

Dora had lived a long time with Cousin Augusta, and she was a religious woman.

"Miss Delight," she said earnestly, "it's a cruel thing to know you're going to die and you so young and all. But you can do a great deal in a year. With all poor Mrs. Denegar's money you can redeem every moment, if you want to. And you can get a great deal of happiness out of it, if you look at it in the right way."

Delight moved rebelliously.

"If I had any strength," she said, "I'd use it in having the good times I never had. That was why she left it to me, Dora."

"If I could have good times I would, Miss

Delight," rejoined Dora pityingly. "You could get a nurse and travel."

Delight shut her eyes and sank deeper into the bed. One year to live, and a fortune! It suddenly occurred to her that for the first time in her life she was free; freer than she had ever been. Free from everything which binds most of the world. Free from the dread of consequences. Free from the necessity of considering what people would say. Free from the bounds that poverty imposes. What could it matter what she did—she, who would be dead before her 'twenty-third birthday? Dora glanced across in terror, for Delight had given a little laugh.

"I'm going to do as you say, Dora. I'm going to be happy."

She put one experimental foot over the side of the bed, and, finding she could stand up, did so.

"Miss Delight, you aren't going to do anything rash, are you?" begged Dora.

Delight stood up in her straight, prim cambric nightgown, and laughed again.

"You might call it that, Dora. And you might get me my clothes, please . . . I'm going out and find year-after-next."

Dora looked at her in terror, as she dressed

swiftly. But she was only going downstairs to her typewriter to write a couple of letters.

"The first person to see," she thought, as she slipped the paper in the machine, "is the lawyer. I must finish with him. Then—I'll find Gloria Jackson—I wonder how you go to work to find a girl you only met once eleven years ago?"

Writing to the lawyer was a simple matter. She remembered too late that telephoning would have been simpler still. Then she took up the telephone book and began to hunt for detective agencies. She had an illogical feeling that if she only went over to the Cathedral grounds Gloria Jackson, with her short pink skirts and flaming red frizzed hair, would be there still. But she knew that a detective agency was her quickest way out. She wrote, asking the one that seemed able to spend the most in advertising to come see her. She wrote to the doctor, too, to come see her. Then she went back to bed and slept peacefully. She was going to start in and live year-after-next.

Dora, coming in next morning with her breakfast, found her lying smiling to herself.

"Please send somebody out to buy all the fashion magazines," was the request she was met with. Dora looked at her with as much surprise as her

excellent training permitted. She had expected, having spent many years under the excellent ideas of Mrs. Denegar, to be sent for a box of tracts.

"Dora," said Delight desperately, "there's one thing you've *got* to remember. I'm no more dying than lots of perfectly healthy girls that are going to be run over by a trolley-car next spring. And you've *got* to stop looking like a bereavement. At least, as if *I* were the bereavement."

"You're a very brave young lady, Miss Delight," said Dora solemnly, and went out herself to buy every fashion magazine on the nearest newsstand. Delight lay happily among her pillows studying *Harper's Bazar* and *Vogue*, and wondering if she could find fantastic gowns like those, if she would also find the courage to wear them. It was wonderful to lie in bed, unrebuked and unguiltily. She had never stayed there after seven-thirty in her life before. She gave a little wriggle of content.

"Oh, year-after-next is fun already!" she said, and wrote a note on the spot to the most expensive department store she remembered to send her a violet silk negligée and a lace cap to match, with flaps. The cap was to have rosebuds on it. She sent the note by Dora, with injunctions to take a

taxi both ways. And so she was clad in these by the time the doctor, her first guest, appeared. He expected to find a pallid and heart-broken creature. He found a bright-eyed girl, eager and gay, exquisitely clad.

"Doctor," she said, "I want you to give me a prescription for a tonic. Something that will make me feel well and gay as long as ever I can. I don't care whether it's good for me. . . . You *must*."

The doctor had been no more prepared for this kind of a Delight than Dora. And whether it was surprise or pity or just to oblige he handed over a prescription, without batting an eyelash: starting Delight off with a bottle of pungent-tasting stuff that you dropped in water and drank hastily.

It did make Delight feel more like herself. She saw the lawyer later in the day, and had a talk with him which staggered him by its directness.

"I know there are lots of Cousin Augusta's people with more right to her money than I have," she said, after they had talked about matters of cash income for a while. "Will you please tell them that the doctor only gives me a year to live. After that it will go back to them. So they needn't mind—do you think they need? "

The poor lawyer caught his breath and said, "No


—no indeed! ” hastily, and it seemed to Delight rather scuttled away. But he never told.

“It’s queer,” she mused to Dora, “my dying seems to upset the doctor and the lawyer more than it does me. And they haven’t got it to do. . . . I suppose they don’t realize what a gorgeous time I’m going to put in that year; more fun than if I lived to seventy any other way. And to think Cousin Augusta lived for Committee meetings! ”

And she composed herself happily to receive the third of her visitors, Mr. O’Sheel of the detective agency. He was a small shiny man with eyeglasses, extremely neat and very watchful, but as unlike William Gillette in “Sherlock Holmes ” as anyone could be. Delight, who had seen Gillette and pinned her faith to him, sighed a little as she proceeded to her task.

“I want you to find for me,” she began, “a girl named Gloria Jackson. She is about twenty-three, with red hair. Her father’s name was William, and her mother’s Laura, and she had an Aunt Jessie. She was in good circumstances when I met her last. She lived here in the city. That’s all I can tell you.”

“And how long ago did you meet her? ” asked the detective, taking diligent notes.



"Twelve years," confessed Delight.

"It's a pretty cold trail," said the detective drily.

"Why, of course it is," said Delight with perfect calm. "That's what I always understood detective agencies were for, to do things that nobody else was clever enough to do."

The detective softened visibly at these kind words.

"Where was she when you met her?" he inquired without further protest.

"At a children's church garden-party on the Cathedral grounds," she explained meekly.

"And what . . . !"

"That's all I know about her. Every word," Delight told him conclusively.

After a conversation about terms he went. He didn't seem particularly hopeful about Gloria, but he promised to do the best he knew how. Delight returned to her fashion magazines.

"You see, Dora," she explained to her messenger, "I haven't time to wear mourning. Anyway, very few people know me, and I'm going away from here as soon as I get some clothes. . . . I have to find out first what's right for morning and afternoon and evening. Then we will shop."

So she spent the rest of the day studying fashions, and the next, after telephoning Mr. O'Sheel to see if he had found any trace of Gloria yet, she took Dora, the car, and a roll of bills she had obtained from the lawyer, and had a delirious time. Dora was not for chaperonage, but because Delight didn't want to faint with nobody around who knew her. As it turned out, she never fainted at all. The purchase of silk sweaters and satin sport skirts and the shoes and stockings and blouses that were meant to live with them completely put any ideas of fainting out of her head.

And, miraculously enough, the day after next brought Gloria. Delight called up Mr. O'Sheel as a part of her morning routine, not with any special idea of doing anything but keeping him on the hunt; to be greeted by—"I think we've located your party, Miss."

Delight nearly dropped the receiver on her chest—she was telephoning from bed—caught it excitedly and said, "Oh, tell me all about it!"

It had been unexpectedly easy, though the detective did not tell her that. He had combed first the telephone book and then the directory. If he had not started eleven years back his quest would have ended more swiftly still. As it was, in this

year's directory he had found three Gloria Jacksons; he had gone to see them all, found two of them the wrong age and color, but the third twenty-two or thereabouts, a capable young person with a mound of red hair and a white apron, who ran a successful tea-room in Greenwich Village. The tea-room was called the Plaid Pup and was cleaner than most. Mr. O'Sheel plainly liked his quarry.

Delight was still unsure. What would a girl whose childhood had been spent in pink taffeta be doing with a tea-room in Greenwich Village, or anywhere? But the red hair sounded like Gloria.

"What's the next thing to do?" she asked the detective.

"I should say that you'd better make an appointment to go down and see the young lady, or to have her come to see you," said the detective practically. "I'd arrange it for you, but you know how folks are. They get scary of detectives."

This seemed to Delight very sound sense. She summoned the chauffeur—she still felt as if it were taking a liberty—and went in search of the Plaid Pup's mistress.

Horace, the chauffeur, had never heard of hostleries with such names and strongly gave forth the feeling of never wanting to again. Also he found

the name beneath his dignity to memorize, apparently; for once in the Village he took her to several eating places named after other impossibly colored animals, under the evident impression that a Purple Pig or a Green Mouse was quite as useful for Delight's purpose as a Plaid Pup could be. But he did manage to deposit her before the right animal eventually; a basement dining-place whose outside was decked by a wooden sign, cut like a very flat little bulldog in red and green plaid. He looked rather as if he had been made out of a piece of dress-goods. Delight, her heart beating hard, went down the three steps into the Pup's interior.

It was near luncheon-time. She remembered that and ran out to tell Horace to get his own luncheon, then return for her. She sat down at one of the little tables near a fireplace, and struck a bell.

The girl who answered her ring was little and fair, obviously not Gloria.

"Is it too early for luncheon?" she asked her, "and could Miss Jackson find time to see me for a little while? My name is Lanier. I don't think she would remember me."

The waitress wasn't quite sure about Miss Jackson, though she was about the luncheon. Delight waited while she went to find out.

"Did you want to see me?" said a brisk voice. Delight looked up to see a little, competent-looking girl with vivid hair and a smile that showed dazzlingly perfect teeth. Why—why—that *couldn't* be Gloria. *She* had been a half-head taller than Delight. But Delight had to speak.

"Yes, very much, for at least half an hour, if you're the Miss Jackson I'm looking for," she said directly. Miss Jackson dropped down in a chair opposite.

"No reason why I shouldn't help you to find out," she said promptly.

"I'm looking for a girl with your name, whose mother and father were named William and Laura, and whose aunt was named Jessie."

Gloria Jackson put both elbows on the table, leaned her face on them, and nodded.

"That's right. They are, or were. What's the answer? Have I a long-lost relative that's left me a million dollars?"

Delight smiled. She began to recognize the up-and-coming small Gloria of the garden-party.

"No," she said gravely. "It's only an offer that—that is to be made you."

"Well, shoot," said Gloria restively.

Delight had meant to find out whether Gloria re-

membered about the garden-party. But she was convinced that as adequate and businesslike a person as this couldn't possibly waste time remembering her childhood.


"I told you it would take half an hour," said Delight deprecatingly.

"I'll risk wasting the half-hour," said Gloria. "No reasonable offer refused."

The way was being made unexpectedly easy. Delight did not realize how entirely respectability and propriety and all the other things were written all over her. There are some people who are given charge accounts on sight—on whom money is pressed by strangers when they mislay their purses, in full certainty of return—to whom mothers confide adored babies and go off perfectly calm and happy. And of these was Delight. You couldn't imagine her being untrustworthy. Not to speak of the sordid fact that a large black limousine with gold lines and a crest, driven by an elderly chauffeur who patently started life as the family coachman, inspires a certain trust in the hearts of men.

Delight, the way opened, went ahead with more confidence from the beginning, after all.

"I know you don't remember me," she commenced. "But I met you a long time ago, when we



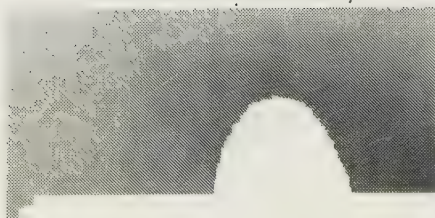
were both little, at a garden-party on the Cathedral grounds. I was one of the little Mary Lebaron girls, in gray alpaca. You found me behind some lilac bushes and dragged me out to have refreshments. You were very proud, and rather rude, but I always remembered you."

"Why, sure I remember!" said Gloria unexpectedly. "I was a horrid little pig, in those days. But I certainly got all there was out of life. I called you the little girl that had to be good. You *were* awfully good, weren't you, and very meek?"

Delight nodded, smiling. "I always have been. But the point is, now, I want a companion for about a year. I want you—it's a sort of promise I made myself when I was little. I have been left a great deal of money. It wouldn't be an ordinary companionship. I never have had any good times. I want somebody to help me have them, to show me how to be a real girl, how to get all there is out of life,—somebody that wouldn't be shocked at my doing things that might seem strange. I'm going to do exactly as I please for a year, and I want you to help me. And I'd pay for your clothes, and give you five thousand dollars beside. You'd be absolutely your own mistress. Only you'd have to promise not to try to run me any more than I'd run

you. It seems to me that unless you love your tea-shop very much it's a good offer."

"Darn good!" said Gloria. "I loathe the tea-shop, as a matter of fact. I simply have to earn my living somehow, and a tea-shop was more in my line than stenography, especially in view of the fact that I can't stenog. I'm inclined to accept your offer. I'll have to look you up first, of course, to be sure that the whole thing isn't out of the 'Arabian Nights'."



CHAPTER IV

DELIGHT smiled a little.

"I'll give you my lawyer's address," she said. "My cousin, whose secretary I was, and who left me the money, was Mrs. John Denegar. You can look her up, too—she's dead, but she was very well known as a philanthropist. I was her last philanthropy. Come and see me, day after tomorrow, and tell me what you decide."

"I'm pretty certain what I'll decide," returned Gloria heartily.

Delight wrote down for her the lawyer's address and her own.

"There's one thing more," she turned back to say, on an impulse. "If you come, please try to like me as much as you can."

She fled into the waiting limousine. She remembered too late, once in, that she had no lunch of any kind, and might faint without it. She hated fainting. There was also a teasing feeling of something she'd always planned to do, that it took her quite a little while to focus. She remembered finally. She intended to go to the Mary Lebaron and explain to

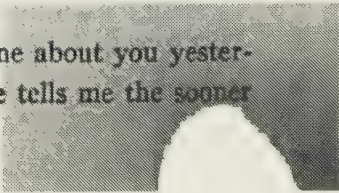
the powers that she had come into six million dollars, and therefore would not need a job. She could have done that, too, over the telephone, but she thought perhaps they might give her something to eat. She did not know where else to go, unless she picked out another chromatic animal, and she didn't feel quite equal to that.

It was a long drive to the Mary Lebaron, far beyond her own home. She made it in an hour and a half, thinking ravenously, toward the last, of the Plaid Pup's bread sticks. But half-past one was just dinner hour, and she arrived on the stroke.

Miss Rider, for whom she asked, invited her to dinner, as she had hoped. She would have invited herself if no invitation had been forthcoming. She walked beside a new young teacher from the school-room to the long dining-room, where the apple-blossoms still tapped the window-pane, feeling as if she had never gone away. She had to look down at her black frock to make sure that it was not gray and shiny and falling into stiff short pleats.

When they had eaten a little and skirted polite topics a little, Miss Rider came to the business in hand.

"I talked to Mrs. Enos Boone about you yesterday, my dear," she said. "She tells me the sooner



you come the better pleased she will be. It will be practically a continuation of the work you did for Mrs. Denegar."

"I can't take it," said Delight. "That's what I came to tell you, Miss Rider. Cousin Augusta left me everything she had."

It took a good deal to startle Miss Rider, but Delight had succeeded.

"Everything she had, my dear?" she echoed, leaving a piece of nourishing stew poised in midair on her fork in a most unteacherly manner.

Delight nodded. "Everything. I'm—I'm not very well—I guess you'll hear about it from somebody or other—so I mightn't have been much good to Mrs. Enos Boone, anyway. I've taken to fainting all over things—it's—*anemia*. That's why—almost the last thing before she died—Cousin Augusta crept up on me and cut off my hair. I *did* cry! But I'm going to go to a hairdresser and see if she can't make it look like new," added Delight inconsequently.

She had found that securing the ends of her hair along a ribbon by an elaborate system of knots and turning it under and fastening a net tightly over it, though it made her look more like a wet cat than she liked, prevented her hair from looking obviously

cut. So Miss Rider hadn't noticed, under the hat and mourning veil.

"What a pity!" she said warmly. "You had such lovely hair. And what plans have you now?" she asked.

"I'll have to go somewhere till I'm better," Delight explained. "The doctor seems to think I'm really quite ill. But before I go—" she stopped a little out of embarrassment—"there's something I'd like to do for the Mary Lebaron, if—if I could."

"Yes, my dear."

A new dormitory was needed. So was a new set of hassocks for the chapel. Miss Rider wondered which of these Delight would most incline to. But Delight knew exactly what she wanted, and didn't intend to make a blanket gift.

"I want," she said, while a couple of the girls nearest her listened unobtrusively but with fervor, "to give all the girls, straight through, dresses and hats like other people. I want to do it twice a year. As long as I live. You see, when I die, I think the money ought to go back to her people. I've practically promised the lawyer that—he seemed so attached to the Denegars! But this year, anyway. And—couldn't they pick them out themselves, within limits, of course?"

The nearest girls continued to listen avidly.

"I'd like them to go out and get the dresses and hats in parties of three or four," Delight went on courageously. "In fact, I'd like to begin today. Few enough so we could have fun. It needn't interfere with the Mary Lebaron official dress, only it would be extra for Sundays, and times when they were so sick of uniforms they didn't know what to do. Please?"

"There'd have to be a Board Meeting," began Miss Rider doubtfully, while the table quivered.

Delight laughed. "Not for a small unofficial excursion. Give me four girls who need an afternoon out. You can be talking to the Board while we have a shopping orgie, but you might tell them unofficially that as long as some of the girls have good clothes it isn't fair the rest shouldn't." She laughed again, mischievously. It was thrilling to be able to do things for people—she only hoped she wouldn't act as if it was too much fun, and shock the girls. It was new, too, to insist on her own way and get it.

She piled six girls instead of four into the limousine, remembering its capacity and collecting the fourteen-year-olds who had sat nearest her at table. There were two very pretty ones among her

haul. Delight hoped she would be able to conceal the fact that dressing them was going to be more fun than dressing the plain ones. But then, she remembered, when they all had the clothes on that she hoped they'd choose, perhaps they wouldn't any of them be plain at all.

She took them straight to the store where Cousin Augusta's charge was. She was continuing it.

"After we're through shopping we're going to tea at the Plaza or the Ritz, or the Biltmore; whichever you like. You can be deciding while we shop," she said.

The stiff, silent little girls unbent from their shyness a little at this, and began to confer eagerly in low voices. Presently the little brown one on the end spoke up for the crowd.

"Can we put on the things we pick out first, Miss Lanier? "

"Why, of course! " said Delight. "That's the point of the party."

"Then you can't dawdle too much, picking out, Claribel," the little brown one told a pretty yellow-braided one, who giggled.

Then the other pretty one, the tall black-eyed one, whose name was Janey, unbent and proved to be the bosom friend of the medium plain girl, Hazel,

and began to plan dresses for them alike in cut, but different in color.

"We always play we're sisters when just the two of us go out, and that's why we're dressed alike," Hazel explained shyly to Delight in a low voice. Delight slipped an arm about Hazel and hugged her. That was just the sort of thing she'd have liked to do herself when she was little, if she had had any bosom friend but the dream-Gloria.

She led a very reassured and gaily chattering group of girls up to the Misses' Department. On the threshold the little brown one—she was named Dorothea—turned gravely and spoke:

"Please tell us the price-limit we mustn't go over, Miss Lanier. And just what can we get?"

Delight was relieved at the child's thoughtfulness. She had not quite known how to arrange that with the girls.


"I want you to get a dress apiece, for summer, shoes and stockings and a hat and wrap to match," she said. "Let's say a price-limit of \$25.00 for the dresses. . . . Seventy-five for everything, Dorothea, let's say. Then if anybody wanted to pay less for a dress and more for a hat, it would come out even."

"*Oh, how lovely!*" breathed Dorothea, making a

bee-line for a merry-go-round of organdie frocks marked "special, \$19.75." Then she turned conscientiously about and informed the other girls, though her eyes were glued to a pale-blue organdie with black velvet bows. The girls stood in an ecstatic whispering group for a minute, then fluttered apart.

Delight made her arrangements meanwhile with a gray-haired and benevolent saleswoman, and suddenly felt herself moved to buy likewise. She was only twenty-one after all. And it was such an adorable little rose-colored organdie for only seventeen dollars—and she could wear misses' sizes perfectly well, she was so slender—and she didn't want to be a blot on the landscape when she took the girls to tea.

The tall dark handsome girl, Janey, had found an excellent blue taffeta which came within her limit, and was trying to persuade her chum to buy one like it; and the chum wouldn't, because her heart was set on a serge coat and skirt that could be worn with or without a blouse—just the collars and cuffs. "And, I could make those," she explained rapidly. The little yellow-haired girl with dimples had set her heart on a white net frock that cost more than it should, if you remembered the



shoes and stockings—she had abandoned any idea of a wrap apparently, for she was being counseled by several friends to the effect that you *couldn't* wear the regulation Mary Lebaron gray alpaca summer coat over a dress like *that!* And so Claribel was sitting down thinking hard, and Delight longed to throw in a wrap for her, only she knew it wouldn't be fair. She dropped a word in the ear of Dorothea, the moving spirit of the group, to the effect that there would have to be time saved out for shoes, hats, and tea. Dorothea nodded absently, quite drunk with shopping. She had her blue organdie clutched fast in a box, and was saying under her breath, "Shoes, eight, stockings, two, hat—I can't do it! I can't get a petticoat! "

"To be sure! " said Delight, "I quite forgot petticoats. That would be \$5.00 more. Tell them, Dorothea."

So Dorothea told them. And they moved joyously on to the misses' petticoats, and then dived with one accord into the fitting-rooms, coming out variously clad and very much prettier, and suppressing as much as possible the gray alpaca coats and elastic-held black straw hats they had gone in with.

Getting hats was another orgy, and Delight fell again—this time deliberately. She had determined

to keep pace with her charges. There was a big rose basket-straw that came down low on her forehead hiding the bareness caused by the back-drawn hair. Her precarious bridge of ribbon and hair-pins came down, and the saleswoman told her that it was "just the hat for bobbed hair," loosening it entirely so that Delight could see the effect. It had not occurred to Delight before that her hair was bobbed—she had considered it cut off. She did not care to look at herself in that guise, and turned forlornly from the mirror to the excited girls around her. The little dimpled girl was still struggling with a desire for clothes beyond her means. Tall Janey was deliberately selecting the very best and most suitable things that her money would cover, with as sure an instinct as if her life had been spent making the most of a small income. Possibly it had. Little brown Dorothea interested Delight the most; she was not buying for suitability or wear or effect, or anything else but sheer pleasure. She found a hat to match her blue organdie; unbraided her hair to flow under it, acquired a ribbon for it, and went dreamily over to a pile of black-strapped slippers, as if they had been hers in fairyland.

Two of the girls were absolutely incapable of enough initiative for personal choice, and Delight

had to do her best for them. They had decided on what each of the other girls had, in turn. A lifetime of gray alpaca had been too much for them. Eventually they ended at a rack of gray frocks, like homing pigeons. But there Delight drew the line. Before they knew it they had a plaid silk apiece—one blue and brown, one red and tan.

Wraps were comparatively easy. Most of them got capes. So did Delight, and then everybody went, after much consultation, to tea at the Biltmore. It was a wonderful tea, with absolutely all the fancy cakes anyone could want, and ice-cream as well as sandwiches. And to crown the edifice, when, gaily dressed, heavily tea'd and generally resplendent, the six descended upon the Mary Lebaron, they were greeted with the news that the Board of Directors was perfectly willing to have all the girls bought clothes, and was even thinking seriously of abandoning the historic gray alpaca frocks in favor of just hit or miss clothes like other children's. So Delight went home too happy to be tired, or to remember that she was still in a gay childish ruffled organdie, with her hair loose under a deep pink hat.

"It was *such* a nice day, Dora," she breathed.

Dora looked with momentary disapproval at the gay garments, then smiled compassionately at Delight.

"I'm glad, Miss," she said. "Would you like to lie down now?"

So Delight took her red medicine and lay down. "And tomorrow Gloria," she said. "Oh, I hope she comes! She's not sure yet."

Gloria came duly. It was not till evening. Delight had been waiting for her all day, in a childish excitement. She felt as if Gloria were a key to everything, as if without her adventures couldn't be started half so well.

"Now, just what is it you want me to do for five thousand dollars and all expenses?" demanded Gloria. "It ought to be a lot to pay for all that. You could get any amount of companions for a fifth of the price."

"It's very honest of you to say that," said Delight musingly. "But you see anyone as efficient as you would have to be offered a good deal more money. And it happened to be you I wanted."

"What for?" said Gloria with directness, once more.

"To begin with, to show me how to dress and

look like other girls—as far as a sallow shadow with short hair can be made to. After that, to—play with me. And not care.”

Gloria shrugged her shoulders. “I never have cared. As for looking like other girls, you look primmer and meeker, that’s all. Too much orphanage, I expect.”

It was the plain-spoken Gloria of old.

“Well, show me how not to be,” said Delight impetuously. “Begin now.”

“Mean that?” demanded Gloria.

Delight nodded.

“We may as well admit that I’m coming. I brought a bag in case you wanted me to stay the night. Do you?”

Delight nodded again.

“Come on upstairs, then. I’ve been aching to fix you up, ever since I saw you.”

They ran up to Delight’s room, where Gloria pushed her into a chair, and began to use cold cream on her recklessly.

“You need color,” she said matter-of-factly applying first tinted powder, then rouge, from a small bag. She finished her work by reddening the pale lips.

“My things aren’t the right shade for you,

of course, but they'll show you what I mean. But your hair's all wrong. Want me to fix it? "

Delight had made up her mind in desperation to have her plaits made up into a wig, and have her own hair cut close enough to go under it, she was so sick of the way Cousin Augusta had made her look.

"I can't look worse than I do," she said despairingly. "Try anything you like."

She sat with closed eyes while Gloria took out the comb and undid the suspension bridge of ribbon, and used a comb and brush with quick, definite strokes, combing her hair straight down over her face like a curtain. Then Delight gave a little cry, for she felt the scissors she hated across her forehead.

"Sit still," said Gloria, more amiably, but to the same effect as Cousin Augusta. After the first shudder Delight resigned herself with her old recollection that it couldn't be worse.

"There! Look!" said Gloria cheerfully, and Delight opened her eyes, shrinking a little. The girl she saw in the mirror was beautiful. The artificial coloring, deftly done, made her clear complexion perfect, and her thick mass of hair framed her

delicate face closely, instead of being strained back. Gloria had cut it like a child's, just above her eyebrows, and so that the flaring, half-curling masses framed her cheeks.

"You look like the princess in a fairy-tale!" said Gloria enthusiastically.

"Yes," said Delight dreamily. "I do."

"I'll get you some rouge that matches, tomorrow," said Gloria. "Then what?"

"Then some shopping, and then we'll leave," said Delight. "Shall I show you your room now? You must be tired."

"Not a bit," said Gloria. "But you are."

She followed Delight again, to the guest-room that had held nothing younger than Dr. Drake and his likes for twenty years. Her bag was there, and Delight assured herself by a quick glance that Dora had put everything in readiness for Gloria. She said good-night quickly. She wanted to hurry back to the new lovely self in the mirror.

"Powder and paint! What would Cousin Augusta say?" was her first thought. "I wonder what Julian Leroy would say if he saw me?" was her second.

She sat for an hour before her glass, trying to realize that the pretty girl was herself. She did

not quite achieve it, but the general effect was cheering.

Next day they had their shopping orgy. As Delight had imagined, Gloria knew the right kind of clothes very well. They came home very tired, followed by enough garments for five trunks, not to mention hat-boxes. There were also the trunks.

"And now," said Delight, "we'll start. Can you drive a car?"

Gloria nodded.

"Then we'll buy one when we get there."

"Where?" asked Gloria, not unnaturally.

"I don't know," said Delight coolly, "that's part of the game. The most I can tell you about the place we're starting for is that it was originally year-after-next."

Gloria didn't grasp remarks like these at all. She thought them metaphors, usually, and let them go at that. She didn't quite know what a metaphor was, either. But she didn't worry over it. They were useless things anyway.

Their starting that night was a metaphor. Delight, still with a strong objection to fainting on her mind, stayed in bed that night and until the next evening. About five she summoned Gloria and asked her to pack enough things in a suitcase to

last two or three days. Gloria did so, interested, but asking no questions. They had dinner, sent for the car, and drove out in it about eight.

"We're going to take a train either from the Pennsylvania or the Grand Central," said Delight. "I think we'd better toss a coin to see which."

Gloria's eye sparkled.

"Fine idea!" she said. "Heads Pennsy, tails G. C."

The nickel advised Grand Central, and Delight directed the chauffeur accordingly.

"Well, what now?" demanded Gloria, as they crossed the great marble floor.

"All my life," said Delight, "I've wanted to walk into a station and take a train to anywhere, not because I ought to go, but just because I wanted to take the train, when everybody else was, and just go! I'm looking now till I find one I like."

"Look out that you don't get on a suburban one that lands you in Westchester somewhere at eleven at night," warned Gloria.

"No danger," said Delight. "It's going to be a sleeper."

They strayed about the station for half an hour.

"I think I like this one on track eighteen," said Delight. Would you mind getting the tickets,

Gloria? I don't want to know a thing about where we're going."

Gloria laughed and went for the tickets. She was a most satisfactory Best Friend, it seemed to Delight.

They were established in the doll's-house comfort of a drawing-room three hours before the train started, with all the novels and papers and magazines either of them wanted, and the delightful feeling of shut-in-ness that a berth or a drawing-room section gives you, if you are susceptible to such feelings.

"Do you know," said Gloria, when they were settled, "that you've asked very few questions about me. I might be a pirate queen or a confidence woman for all you know."

"No, I don't think so," said Delight leisurely. "If you'd been either of those I wouldn't have found you running a tea-shop. And anyway, that didn't matter. When I was a little girl I wanted you to live with me, and I'm keeping a promise to myself."

"I see," said Gloria, "very much as you'd buy a child's red parasol because you'd wanted it then."

"Something," Delight admitted. "But I want you now too. I'd like to hear what's happened to

you since you went to the garden-party, though. Are your people . . .”

“Dead,” said Gloria. “My father made a high salary and we lived up to it, the way you do in New York. He and mother died within a year of each other. Mother first. I’d run around a lot with some of the art set in the Village. I was studying art—and I had about enough left to start the Plaid Pup. I don’t mean art, I mean cash. It’s gone fairly well, but so far I haven’t made more than my living at it. I’ve found a girl to put in as manager, so I’ll probably go back to it when my year with you is over.”

Delight shivered a little. “Are we traveling north or south?” she asked quickly.

“Up to New England, somewhere or other. The train makes a lot of stops, but you said you wanted it. It doesn’t get in till one tomorrow, wherever it gets to.”

“You know what we’re going to do?” said Delight. “We’re going to look out the window tomorrow whenever the train stops and when we see a place we like we’re going to get off and stay there till we’re tired of it.”

“Sounds all right to me,” said Gloria the accommodating. She buried herself in a novel until it

was bedtime, then retired in a businesslike manner. Delight did not go to sleep so soon. She had never before been on a sleeping-car, and she did not want to miss any of it. Finally fatigue was too much for her, and she snapped off the light and shut her eyes.

Next day they watched country towns idly from the window of first their dining-car and then their section, till somewhere around ten-thirty. It was Gloria who saw it first.

"*That* looks like a nice place," she said.

"Let's try it," responded Delight, and rang for the porter violently. He had been tipped heavily the night before, and instructed to be on the alert if they rang, because it meant they were going to get off. He was there with swiftness according, and the girls stood on the platform surrounded by suitcases and magazines before they had fairly realized what had happened.

"It's a fine spring morning, and we live in a place called Elsinore," observed Gloria. "I hope they have station Fords."

"Yes, there's one," said Delight. "It's such a nice station it would be sure to have something to take people in."

"There don't seem to be any houses," said Gloria.

"I suppose," said Delight vaguely, but with perfect truth, "that they're somewhere else."

She beckoned to the Ford.

"Take us to where there are some houses, please," she requested.

The driver looked at her, rather hurt.

"You mean the residential district?" he corrected her.

"Of course," said Delight soothingly, and got in. "And when you get there drive us through slowly," she added. "We are thinking of buying."

"That was a fine stroke," said Gloria, as the driver visibly impressed, started off. Delight smiled and said nothing.

They drove gaily through Elsinore through pleasant avenues of pretty suburban houses with lawns and sprinklers; then out further, where the houses were more scattered and the grounds larger. A few of them showed signs of inhabitants, but many of them were unoccupied.

"The summer folks ain't here yet," volunteered the driver. "That is, not many of 'em."

"Drive us around the grounds of some of these houses," demanded Delight, leaning out to look at the great rosy bushes that were at the gateway of the house nearest her.

"This is a nice place," commented Gloria.

"Too large," said Delight. "And the grounds are just lawns and stiff."

"It's a show place," said the driver, his local pride offended.

"Well, there must be more of them. Show them to us," said Delight.

CHAPTER V

THE driver said to his friends afterwards that he didn't know why he let himself be ordered round by a passell of girls, but at the time he did exactly as Delight requested. He drove them in and out of the grounds of a half-dozen lovely places. At the seventh Delight asked him to go more slowly, and they took their time.

The grounds were not so large as those of some other houses they looked at. There were broad lawns, sown so thickly with trees that they made almost a little woodland, except at the back, where there were a couple of tennis-courts and a croquet-ground. There was a fountain tucked away among the trees at one side, with a little stone-faced pool around it. You could see that in time there were going to be all the kinds of flowers in the world in the flower-beds and down the borders.

"I like this," said Gloria. "It's so much more human than the rest of the houses we've seen."

"We haven't seen the house yet," said Delight, whose eyes were shining happily. "Drive us up

close to it," she told the driver. "Up to the very porch."

She sprang out on the side porch and looked around her.

"I think this is it," she murmured. "I wonder."

She disappeared around the corner of the porch, her soft hair blowing about her face in the spring sun and wind. Time went on, the driver and Gloria waited on the porch, and Delight did not return.

Finally Gloria went in search of her. There was no Delight to be seen, but a pried-up window showed the way she had gone, and Gloria followed. The window led into a dining-room that, even with its furniture shrouded in brown linen, was friendly-feeling.

"Gloria! Gloria! Come quick!" cried Delight's voice from somewhere below stairs. Gloria ran in the direction of the voice, down what seemed to be going to be a cellar.

It wasn't really; that is, it was more of a super-cellar. It had been fitted up as a gymnasium. There were still rings and bars. But occupying most of the floor-space was a large, empty cement tank, unquestionably, when filled with water, a swimming-pool.

"It's my house!" said Delight raptly. "There's

very little question about it, Gloria; it's my house in year-after-next! "

"Your house in year-after-next?" demanded Gloria, not unnaturally. "It looks like a tank to me."

"It takes a good deal of explaining, and I don't know how romantic you are," said Delight apologetically. "Part of it would shock you, and I'm quite sure you'd think some of it silly. I only mean that it is almost exactly like a house I've always planned and wanted. I'm going to buy it and live here."

"Good Lord!" said Gloria.

"I suppose you'll think I'm mad and I suppose that means I'll have to tell you," said Delight desperately. "I have pernicious anemia, and I'm going to die within the year. So I simply *have* to crowd everything I want into now. . . . Please don't be sympathetic, and don't tell a soul."

"I—I won't," gasped Gloria, staring at Delight across the tank. "But I must say," she added, "that I think you're a sport. And I'll go the limit with you, whatever kind of a limit you want to pick out."

She came around the tank and slapped Delight on the shoulder, boyishly. Delight smiled and put

her hand over the one on her shoulder. Gloria was beginning to be a real Best Friend.

"I can't tear myself away from the house," said Delight; "and it's awfully kind of you, Gloria, not to be properly gloomy about me. Could you get the driver to take you down to the village to get things to eat, and get hold of the electrician and the plumber and—oh yes, the real-estate agent?"

Gloria nodded and ran up the stairs. Delight hoped that she had not turned so abruptly to hide tears on her eyelashes. She was afraid she had seen them.

But she turned happily again to go upstairs and explore further.

There was no mysterious closet full of playthings. But then, Delight remembered, you can't have everything. There was a little dancing-room: not pretentious enough to be called a ballroom, but big enough for any dances she would be likely to have. There were downstairs rooms that looked easy to live gaily in.

"They must have been very nice people who lived here before," she thought.

Then she remembered that Gloria would be back soon with provisions, and began rummaging in the kitchen. She had found two grayish tin forks and

a kitchen knife, and the key to the china closet, hidden ostrich-like in a china cup on the kitchen dresser, in five minutes. She set the table with these and the Wedgwood tea-set, which came nearest to hand, and then explored some more.

"The agent says if you're a responsible person you can have it," called Gloria from outside the dining-room window. "And I had him long-distance your lawyer, and he said you were. And he wanted to put us out on the lawn till it was done regularly, but I told him immediate occupancy was a condition of your purchase. He'll be up in a minute, which will just about give us time to open these cans and eat out of them."

"What about the driver?" said thoughtful Delight.

"I've sent him to the public garage to inquire the chances of buying a nice little open car for the summer. You said you wanted one, didn't you?"

"Yes, so I did," Delight answered.

Gloria's promptness was admirable. So they waited for the agent, who when he came exhaled a faint feeling of suspecting they were actresses, but of wishing to seem worldly enough not to mind that at all. Delight conjured a little with Cousin

Augusta's name, and, though her childish fluff of curls and Gloria's startling red mop still caught his eye uneasily at intervals, the agent was less worldly afterwards. Cousin Augusta had been well known and highly respected.

Delight had never known how easy it was to buy houses, lock, stock, and barrel, including the china and the furniture. All she had to give for all this was a little piece of paper with her name on it, which cost her nothing whatever. And Cousin Augusta had always made such a fuss giving people checks—expected so much gratitude!

The reason she got the house so easily was that really nobody wanted it. It had been the wedding-present from her father of a girl whose husband had been killed in the war. And the girl had married again, a very wealthy man with all the houses he needed. So this house, after its year of gay occupancy by the bridal couple, had stood idle. People had thought of buying it, but the owner's second husband had insisted that she hold it till the full asking price was given. It wasn't a terrific asking price, either, considering.

Delight was sorry the girl's first husband had died. But he was probably happy, and apparently the girl was, because she had married somebody

else, and Delight herself was going to be *very* much happier. And the agent was radiant.

Gloria rose and prepared to go downtown again as soon as the deed was drawn and signed.

"There have to be servants," she reminded Delight, "not to speak of knives and forks."

"Oughtn't I to do that?" Delight asked hesitatingly. "It seems a great deal to ask of you."

"Oh, do it if you want to," answered Gloria, "but I like doing things like that and I probably do them better than you do."

Delight recognized the essential truth of both statements. She didn't think she would be clever at picking out servants, and it didn't interest her particularly, anyway. It would be different if she were married, she supposed—you'd want everything perfect, chosen by you personally, so you were sure, if there was someone . . .

She supposed that the plump, black-eyed girl in yellow was thinking very hard about servants now. But it wouldn't be difficult to keep Julian Leroy pleased. He always seemed to be pleased with everything . . . like a wind of joy passing you. . . . It would be wonderful to feel that happiness he gave people, just once more. It didn't matter

now what she did. Nothing was bold or unmaidenly any more. She called after Gloria.

"Gloria! After you've done all you can about the servants will you either telegraph or long-distance Dora, at the New York house. I think she'd do for a housekeeper. Tell her to bring the silver, send the trunks, and to find out for me before she comes just where Julian Leroy and the girl he's going to marry are, and will be for the next two weeks."

Gloria nodded briefly, whistled the taxi man, who must have been beginning to feel like a family retainer by this time, and was gone. Delight, the keys of the house in her hand, swung them thoughtfully on one finger and looked out the door over her new domain. She smiled a little whimsically. She was wondering if, in a locked closet beside the stairs, should she find the right key on the ring, there would be a new and wonderful set of toys such as every little girl is wild to own; and if she turned about and went into the long living-room she would find, sitting beside a perfect and unbelievably complete doll's-house, a bookcase containing the ends of all the unfinished fairy-tales in the world. She did not go to see. Instead she put her head down on the steps and cried and cried,—just why, she did not

know. It was partly for the little Delight in the gray alpaca gown that was not a uniform—not really a uniform, because it might have different colors of braid on it; and partly for the grown Delight, moving through this masquerade for a little while.

“You’ll cry your complexion all off,” said Gloria’s brisk voice, and she felt Gloria’s hand on her shoulder, “and you mayn’t be able to wash your face for some hours, as the water isn’t on yet.”

She lifted her head, and jumped up, smiling at Gloria.

“I don’t know why I cried. Because I have what I always wanted, I suppose. . . . Let’s go look at the garden and see what it wants done to it.”

The plumber and the gas-man and the electrician came sociably driving up together about this time, the two latter having been invited to ride by the plumber. So it was felt by the girls to be the better part of valor to flee to the grounds.

These extended farther back than Delight had thought, to where a little woodland circled an empty space of lawn.

“This is lovely. They must have danced here,” mused Delight.

"It's just the place for an open-air theater," said Gloria.

"It *would* be nice," said Delight idly. "When do you think Dora ought to get here?"

"Tomorrow morning, if she started as soon as she got my message, or tomorrow night, if she stops to fuss around and get the silver cleaned. I'd be inclined to bet on tomorrow night. The cleaning women can look after us till then. They're cleaning upstairs now. The agent said something about linen going with the house. You'd better take your keys and look for the linen closet, so they can make the beds."

Delight saw the wisdom of this, and went to look. She would have to hunt through the closets that had been toy closets in her imaginary house. It was silly, but she didn't want to. Nevertheless she did it. She unlocked the closet in the foyer first. There was no linen there. She was secretly glad.

"Nothing at all but a plum-colored smell," Gloria always declared she said. Both girls really knew that linen-closets rarely dwelt on ground floors of houses, unless they were far at the back, but they explored and unlocked for the mere joy of unlocking and exploring. They finally ran the linen and

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blankets to earth on the top floor. But there had been many exciting moments in between. There was the thrilling closet that opened back into eaves, and could be crawled into if you had a lantern—which they were rather glad they hadn't—and another one on whose floor lay, forgotten, a silver shoulder-bar, with a wisp of chiffon tangled to it. Delight picked it up.

"Oh, look! *They* stayed here, you know, the first year they were married. And then the War came and he went. They must have been hunting through the closet for something—and then they laughed and kissed each other, and her sleeve got tangled in his shoulder-thing—and it was loose and came off. And they were young and careless, and they never knew where they'd lost it. . . . And he never came back, and she married somebody else. Isn't it queer how things turn out? But somehow it makes me feel sorry."

"Well, I think it's rather creepy, the way you tell it," said Gloria practically. "But if I were you I'd hold the thought firmly that otherwise you wouldn't have been able to buy the house."

"I suppose so," said Delight. But she slipped the shoulder-bar, with the rag of gauze, into the pocket of her sweater, just the same.

"They've had nice times here," she said suddenly, as they mounted another flight. "It's a happy-feeling house."

"It is cheerful," said Gloria. "But if I feel all right most places feel cheerful to me, anyway. It's a good old world."

She stretched luxuriously in a patch of sunshine slanting from an overhead window, like a pleased cat. Delight, always very sensitively responsive to the moods of others, felt, too, that the world was good. And just on top of that they discovered the linen-closets, and carried sheets in profusion to the cleaning women.

One woman stayed on to look after them, and, as she said, keep the young things comfortable in the big house all by themselves.

Next evening Dora turned up, staid and responsible and with a certain air of tracts about her which Mrs. Denegar's domestics all caught sooner or later. With her came the silver, and the assurance that all the trunks were on their way, and a couple of maids whom she stated firmly she had taken the liberty of bringing. It was a liberty they liked very much, for the cleaning woman seemed to want to go home to her children, regarded as a maid, though when she found herself again occupy-

ing the status of cleaning woman she appeared delighted to go on working and remarked with complacency that the basement alone needed three good days put on it.

"And here's the addresses you wanted, Miss Delight," said Dora, producing a slip of paper from her handbag. "Mr. Julian is visiting a friend of his in a place called Wyndham, where Miss Morse lives in the summer. He'll probably be there a good long time, if he's like most young men."

"Thank you, Dora," said Delight from the couch where Dora had tucked her up and administered the red medicine, "but why aren't they married yet? I thought when people announced their engagement they were always married, soon after."

"They should have been, Miss Delight. But Miss Morse is a young lady with very proper feelings, and Mrs. Denegar's death made her feel that she should postpone it. So I was told."

Delight, half asleep on her couch, felt a little puzzled. The fleeting glance she had of the fiancée, with her yellow frock and half-insolent smile, had not made her feel that she was so full of feeling as that came to. But you can't tell very much from a glance. She might have been mistaken. She tightened her hand around the paper and went quite to

sleep, for she had been leading a busy life of late. Just before she went entirely off she wakened enough to ask one more question:

"Did you hear anything of the Mary Lebaron girls? "

"Why, yes, Miss Delight, I did. I should have told you before, only the house put it out of my head. Miss Rider, she said it was, called up and gave me a message for you. She said to please tell you that all the girls had chosen their clothes and thanked you very much. And that the Board of Directors had definitely decided to make the change."

"Oh, I'm so glad! " Delight answered drowsily. There would be no more little Mary Lebaron girls wearing gray uniforms that they were desperately tired of. Nobody would taunt them about belonging to an orphanage any more. She went to sleep more happily, if possible, than she had last night, and dreamed that she was ten again, with her rose-colored organdie that she had bought the day she took the girls shopping, in a glass case that she didn't dare break.

It was pleasant to find Dora at her bedside with coffee the next morning. She drank it, and kept the maid with her, meanwhile. And, because it was

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pleasant to do, she began to talk to her of Julian.

"What does he do?" she asked idly.

"Nothing much yet, Miss Delight. He only got out of college a year and a half ago. He's taking a post-graduate course, I think they call it, in being a landscape gardener and architect. It doesn't seem to me that gardening's a thing anybody ought to waste their time taking up, after they've been given a college education by their kind aunt."

"Oh, did Cousin Augusta—why, she *was* a kind person, wasn't she? It's hard to remember sometimes. I guess because she talked about it."

Dora did not answer, because it was not a remark she approved of.

"Landscape gardener and architect," she repeated. She pronounced the last word like archbishop. "Will you be getting up soon, Miss Delight?"

"Not *just* this minute," Delight said softly. "I have to get some thinking done first."

Thinking did not take very long.

"An open-air theater," she said half aloud. "Even if he isn't through his course he ought to be able to build one of those. Oh, I *must* get up!" Which she did, flying in bathrobe and slippers to

demand of a very sleepy Gloria how soon they could buy the car and have it for their own. Gloria thought today, if they bullied the man and paid cash.

"Then do get up, so we can have breakfast over and bully him!" demanded Delight impetuously.

"See here, stern employer," said Gloria, "I won't get up for another half-hour. I need rest after our wild life. And anyway, he won't open till nine."

Delight had forgotten this peculiarity of business houses. So she went back to dress, and prowled the house till Gloria was clad and through breakfast. Gloria was quite right. A combination of cash and bullying, the former contributed by Delight and the latter by Gloria, put the two girls in possession of a shiny new car which Gloria could drive, and assured Delight that she could too in a couple of days. They drove it home on the spot, and housed it in the garage, which seemed glad to get a car to live in it, once more. They had forgotten to buy a road-book and a flashlight, so they immediately and pleasantly drove back and got those. It seemed to Delight that Gloria drove well.

"Do you want to rest tonight or go out in the car?" she inquired politely of her companion.

"Just one more night's sleep, kind lady," im-

plored Gloria. "I've been running the Plaid Pup, please remember, while you've been shopping and clothing orphans—well, inhabitants of an endowed school, then. Tomorrow I'll go anywhere you like, but tonight I sleep."

It was not till a good deal later that it occurred to Delight to suspect Gloria's good faith. So carefree and slangy a person couldn't be watching out to spare your strength. So she yielded, and they spent that day merely drifting about the grounds, and the night from ten on in sleeping the sleep of the just.

But they couldn't keep out of their new toy the next day. Delight spent most of her time learning to drive it. They had dinner in a preoccupied fashion and fled to the car again the moment their meal was over. It was one of those unseasonably hot days and nights which sometimes come in May, and the car was the coolest place to be.

"Where'll we go?" asked Gloria, taking the wheel. Delight produced the flashlight and the road-book.

"Straight ahead for five miles on this road, till we come to a red church on the right," she said.

"You evidently know where you want to get to," said Gloria, taut and erect at the wheel. The

wildest winds that blew never made Gloria look untidy. "I hope there's a beau or an ice-cream soda or both at the end of the journey. I haven't seen a man for two weeks except agents, and other married creatures, and I feel that I shall kidnap the next good-looking one I see."

Delight gave a little laugh of pure amusement.

"I won't promise for tonight," she said, "but I'll do my best for you tomorrow. I think I have money—yes, here it is—two quarters and a dime. That's enough for sodas."

"I suppose sodas are all we can reasonably expect this early in the game," said Gloria with a sigh of resignation. "I forgot to ask you when you hired me whether followers were allowed. Because I know several worthy youths who might be persuaded to follow me from New York if I asked 'em pretty."

"Why, of course!" said Delight joyfully. "We'll have a house-party as soon as the house is to Dora's liking and the swimming-pool filled."

"Red church on the right achieved, but it doesn't seem to have a soda-fountain. Terribly behind the times," said Gloria. "What next?"

"Turn to right, three miles to cross-roads," Delight read. "Do you know," she lifted her head to

say, "a road-book seems such a fairy-tale thing always. You follow it little by little, and when you've passed three red churches and nine rivers and seven cross-roads, or something like that, you find the thing you've been looking for."

"In the books it was a fairy prince, generally, with the witch's very impolite daughter keeping guard over him—that is, if you were a female," commented Gloria. "You give me hope. I feel personally that I'm a match for any witch's daughter in the world, in this excellent blue frock. Delight, you were a darling to give it to me."

Delight shook her head, smiling.

"That was in the bargain as well as followers. I do *love* clothes."

"So do I," Gloria answered. "What comes after the cross-roads? The prince?"

"Keep to the right for five miles," Delight told her.

The country road down which they were driving was a beautiful one. There was nearly a full moon, and it silvered the road ahead of them till it looked almost as if it had been snowed on. The young leaves in the woods that bordered each side of the way, now that they were past the little village of the red church, had come out visibly in the day's

heat. They too were silvery in the moon. An occasional misguided bird, seeing the flash of the headlights, gave a sleepy chirp; otherwise everything was still. The air was fresh and pine-scented. It was, indeed, a roadway at whose end you might think to find the real Fairyland, at the very least, if not the prince of the fairy-tale. Except for an occasional question on Gloria's part, answered by a direction from the book on Delight's lap, they were silent.

"There's the last cross-roads you read about. Public library on right, park on left. Now what?" demanded Gloria.

CHAPTER VI

THEY had come about thirty miles. This time Delight looked not at the road-book but at a slip of paper which she drew out of her pocket.

"Do you think that you could find 32 Elm Street?" she asked.

"Do you mean that we're paying a social call?" Gloria inquired. Delight shook her head.

"No. Not a call. I—I'd just like to drive past it so we'll know where it is next time."

"Nothing," Gloria assured her fervently, "nothing, that is, next to the ice-cream soda and the beau, could make me happier than to know where 32 Elm Street is next time."

Delight, quite unmoved, watched eagerly for the names on the streets.

"Oak—Walnut—Magnolia—why on earth Magnolia, I wonder?" Gloria commented. "Locust—Beech—we *must* come to Elm soon. There aren't any more trees left, except Eucalyptus, and I don't believe they'd heard about eucalyptuses when this town was built. Chestnut—here we are. Elm

. . . now for the rapturous discovery of 32.
Hist! ”

They drove more slowly, Delight eyeing the numbers on the gate-posts as they went. The houses on Elm Street were leisurely-looking old brick places, set far back from the street, and with yards full of flowers.

“ I like your friends,” said Gloria. “ It’s a bit sleepy for my taste, but very nice for a call. Twenty-eight—I say, Delight, your friends are up! ”

She halted the car, watching mischievously to see what would happen next. A lively conversation was going on, apparently, between a fence-post and a window.

“ Oh, come to bed! ” said a tenor voice plaintively from the window.

“ But I don’t want to! ” rejoined a baritone one from the neighborhood of the fence. “ I’ve just got the mosquitoes trained not to bite me, and you want me to waste hours of agonized labor! ”

“ Rats! ” said the voice from the window. “ They’ll bite you a lot less upstairs, and we’re going fishing tomorrow at six.”

“ But I feel like a bird. I don’t want to die to the world temporarily. That’s all going to sleep is,

dying for the time being. And I won't feel like a bird tomorrow morning at six,—at least, I'll feel like a boiled owl, but that isn't really the same thing. Bill, can you call yourself my friend, and deliberately condemn me to plunge myself into a state which will eventuate in my being a boiled owl? ”

“ If you don't stop that rotting I'll come down and make you,” threatened the voice at the window.

“ It's the only way you'll ever get me to bed,” said the voice by the fence. “ But I must say, more in sorrow than in anger, that you aren't what I call a true friend. Nor a really thoughtful host. You should say sweetly, and with gush, ‘ Oh, my de-ar Julian! This is Liberty ’ . . . ”

But while he was expressing these final sentiments the voice at the window had taken itself and its owner stealthily down a highly useful trellis. The voice at the gate-post ended in a squeak and a gurgle, and two white-flanneled figures rolled struggling out into the appreciative moonlight.

“ Admit that it's—no night to—go to bed,” said Julian's voice in jerks, as he held his host to the ground.

“ I admit it. But there's nothing else to do. Waste of a fine night. Come on, you donkey! ”

Delight sprang from the little car and ran to the gate.

"Oh yes, there is!" she called. "Come on, Julian—come on, Bill! Come for a nice ride with the pretty ladies."

The combatants rolled apart with one accord, rose to their feet as if they had been made of rubber, and stared.

Delight stood still in the gateway, a slim, lovely figure in her organdie with her short loose half-curls tossing around her face. In the moonlight she looked so ethereal as to be almost unreal.

"Come!" she said again, laughing. "Don't you remember Delight Lanier, Julian? Get in, you and Bill. Whichever of you knows the most about cars had better drive. Gloria says she wants an ice-cream soda."

"Delight Lanier!" said Julian slowly. "But she didn't look like you."

Delight flushed. Was she so much prettier as all that?

"She didn't wear a pink dress," said she. "And you might tell me Bill's last name in exchange for Gloria's. That's Gloria on the front seat."

"Gloria willing to exchange her name for mine?" interrupted Bill promptly. "Lead me to

her. Gloria, behold me! I am William L. Johnson of Yale, commonly called Bill. Now, what sort of a name can you come across with in return for that? "

Gloria gave a little shriek of laughter.

"It's—it's Jackson!" she managed to reply. "It's one worse! "

"It is indeed," said Bill, "but as I like red hair I won't hold it against you. Most folks call you Glory, anyhow."

Delight and Julian, meanwhile, were looking at each other in a strange silence. Over Delight was flowing the sense of happiness, of gaiety, almost of mischief, which Julian's presence had given her before when she met him. Oh, she must—she must have as much of the happiness that being in the same place with him gave her as she could, before he married. The girl would have him, and the aura of happiness he gave, for years and years and years. And Delight only had a year for everything.

"Come," she said imperatively, breaking the silence. Bill had already ensconced Gloria and himself modestly in the back seat. Delight could hear them hilariously addressing each other as "Mistar Jacksing" and "Mistah Jonsing." Julian

laughed and helped Delight into the seat next the driver and took his place at the wheel.

"Sodas first!" called Gloria from behind them.
"The drug-store, James!"

"I'm not sure whether we have any money," said Julian. "I think Bill spilled mine all out of me when he went mad and attacked me on the grass just now. Very dangerous animal when loose, Bill. Say, Bill, any money?"

"Yep. Two dollars, and the seventy-five cents that dropped out of your pocket when I rolled you over. We can offer any lady nourishment up to that limit, even when kidnapping us."

"Do you know, it just fell from heaven, your coming along this way," said Julian, the money question once settled. "Old Bill and I were so bored with each other that we'd probably have been found mutually murdered if you and Miss Jackson hadn't happened along. You see, Edna's away—that's the girl I'm engaged to—and it's an awful sell, for I only invited myself to stay with Bill because she lives here. I'll write and tell her about this joy-ride—tell her I was stolen by my aunt once removed, by Jove! You *are* my aunt once removed, aren't you?"

"If it will make you feel more chaperoned, I

am," said Delight coolly. He looked at her full for the first time.

"Do you know, I think it might be quite as well for me to feel very much chaperoned," he said. "When a girl that looks like you comes along out of a pink cloud and carries a fellow away, he needs to hold very fast to the idea that he's her maiden aunt—she's his maiden aunt I mean."

They both laughed.

"Don't forget the drug-store," suggested Delight.

"I won't. Around the corner. It doesn't look as if it came over with Plymouth Rock, so the inhabitants conceal it. Delight, what makes you look so different, if you don't mind? I had a recollection of you as a thin, shy, pale young woman about thirty, with her hair done up in those awful ropes, the way old maids do to show it's heavy. How old are you—do you mind telling me?"

"How old do you think?"

"Eighteen, nineteen, maybe."

She shook her head, reluctantly. "Twenty-one."

"I'm twenty-four," said Julian. "Old as the hills compared to you, and with heaps more experience. I think I'll be an uncle to you."

"You'd make a very nice one. I may ask you to," she said.

"Here, Jule! You're miles past Gloria's drug-store! We have to feed the hungry!" yelled Bill.

"Just driving round the block," said Julian with perfectly apparent falseness, "so a better view of the drug-store will burst on 'em. There's everything in first impressions."

"Then I suppose you'll always remember me as an old maid in a black dress," said Delight disconsolately, but with a sidewise look out of her great gray-blue eyes that was full of mischief.

"That wasn't you. It was somebody else. (I know what you want. It's a maple-nut sundae with whipped cream on its head.) The first impression I had of you was of a sort of a moonlight-lady, not real a bit—somebody out of a story-book when I was a kid, all pink cheeks and goldy-brown curls and eyes twice too big for real life. I don't think I want to see you in the daytime. You might be real."

Delight shook her head half wistfully.

"I'm not real. I never shall be. I'm out of a queer old child's story called 'Year-after-next.'" And very soon I'm going to have to vanish back into it, maybe. So you and Bill and Gloria ought to be very nice to me and do everything I want you to."

"Good Lord, haven't we so far, every minute?"

"Yes, very nicely. You *have* nice manners, Julian—you say such comforting things. I like being a moonlight lady when you tell me about it—I haven't always before." She finished her soda with a regretful slowness.

"Oh, hurry up!" called Bill. "We aren't going to be parted for ever so long yet; Gloria says so."

Julian and Delight had been so deep in their talk that they had forgotten there was anywhere else to go.

"I paid for you and your lady-friend, my poor fellow, knowing you to be penniless," said Bill in a loud stage-whisper. "But if you stay any longer she may want another, and I refuse to encourage extravagance in your class of life. Get a wiggle on."

Julian didn't wiggle—he had a peculiar swift grace in his movements—but he executed some sort of a sudden serpentine evolution that made Bill sit down hurriedly on the floor; apologized for his friend's condition to the grinning drug-clerk in a much louder stage-whisper than Bill's, and dashed out to the front seat of the car with a convulsed Delight and all the honors of war.

"Where now?" he asked. Delight opened the

road-book and told him. "Nice car," said Julian. "Mind if I drive fast?"

"Not a bit. Only take the road to Elsinore."

"That's in Shakespeare," objected Julian. "You might as well tell me to take the road to Arden."

Bill, catching a word here and there, called to them.

"Arden's fifty miles away. You don't want to go there. Elsinore's where these girls belong. They have an ancestral mansion they just bought. They're taking us there to hold for ransom, I think. Gloria says really nice boys like us are rare anywhere, but especially rare in Elsinore and Kaswacket."

"Elsinore—oh, it's real, then," said Julian. "I thought it was in Year-after-next."

"No, it's thirty miles from here as the car flies, and Kaswacket is before you get to it," explained Delight, matter-of-factly.

"What's thirty miles between friends?" said Julian, and stepped on the gas.

They had no business to cover thirty miles at night, in something less than an hour. But they did it. It was not ten when the girls led Julian and Bill into the dining-room at Elsinore and got out the chafing-dish.

"They are going to feed us, Bill," announced Julian. "We have fallen into kind hands."

"I am beginning to cease regretting my lavish expenditures on ice-cream sodas," replied Bill, who, in the light, proved to be a freckled person with sandy hair and a cheerful grin.

"Well, you have us in your power, desperate females. What're you going to do with us?" he demanded.

"Keep you if possible," laughed Delight, as she rummaged the side-board for the between-meals store they had already laid up there. "Not tonight though. We're going to feed you heavily and send you back with the car. You'll have to keep it all night—so you're in honor bound to return it tomorrow."

"Then, you'll drive us back, won't you?" demanded Julian, who was doing wonders with a can-opener. "Then we can take you home again in it. Fine scheme."

"It sounds like rather too endless a chain," Delight demurred.

"Or the Flying Dutchman," said Gloria.

"As a matter of fact," said Delight, looking anything but matter-of-fact herself as she said it. "I

lured you here to show Julian my new back-yard I've just bought."


Gloria suddenly looked as if she knew something: but she said nothing whatever. Merely put more pepper in the salad-dressing. The two men took it as an excellent joke, to be greeted by shouts of laughter. But Delight calmly let them go on till all the eating was finished, and then led them out, picking her flashlight up by the way, to the expanse of lawn and shrubbery which had so cried aloud to Gloria for a theater. Gloria looked still more as if she knew a great deal. Gloria really was a very wise young person.

"Here's the back-yard," said Delight.

"It's a natural amphitheater," remarked Julian.

"I wondered if you would see that," Delight said with eagerness. "That's what Gloria says too. But it needs a real theater put up on it. I want one in a dreadful hurry, so we can act there this summer." She spoke hurriedly now, and very nervously. The young men both stood quiet, and heard her out.

"And—and it would be so very kind, Julian, if you would draw plans for it, and build it, and everything up to the very last scrap. You—you could write an estimate—isn't that what architects



do? And—and it would be easier if you and Bill came to stay here with us. A sort of house-party. I'd get somebody grown-up—somebody old, I mean,—for a chaperon. Don't you think it would be the wisest way? ”

Julian, for once in his light-hearted young life, was struck dumb. A chance like this didn't come every young man's way before he was through his course.

“ Good Lord! Are you sure you want that? ” he asked.

“ Of *course*. And I really have lots of money—haven't I, Gloria? It would be all right.”

“ I'll accept with pleasure,” said Julian promptly. “ But wouldn't it be all right if I stayed with Bill, and came out and worked? It seems a shame to put you to all that trouble about a chaperon, and having us round. And—and besides, it would be pretty far from Edna. Edna had to be away, you see, just as I came down. And we won't see anything much of each other if I stay over here. I have to spend some time with mother this summer, too. So . . . ”

“ But don't you see how beautifully that would arrange things? ” Delight broke in. “ If your mother could only arrange to be here and chaperon

us, then your fiancée could stay here too. We'd have a *lovely* time. Some of Gloria's friends are coming down, you know."

"Say, that's a ripping idea! As snappy a thought as ever I heard offered!" said Bill. "Accept, quick, Jule, before the lady sees you by daylight and calls it off!"

"Of course it *is* a gorgeous plan," said Julian heartily. "As far as I'm concerned I'd like it a lot. Of course I can't promise for mother and Edna. But I will if they will! It's great. . . . Why, with any luck Edna and I ought to be nearly able to marry on that."

"I'm glad, then. I'll write to them both tonight. I know your mother a little," Delight said. She smiled a goodby as the two men went off later, standing beside Gloria and waving to them. But her face was a little shaded; not quite as light-heartedly happy as it had been all the rest of the evening.

"Some little friends, what?" said Bill as they whizzed back to Wyndham. "Why didn't you ever break it to me about the red-haired one, you stingy old pup? You don't need a harem, when you're engaged to the eyes!"

"Never met her before—only Delight," Julian

returned in a musing voice. "I wonder what was the matter, just at the last. She seemed to quiet down so."

Bill snorted. "Edna's a nice girl, but once you've broken the news to the rest of the skirts you needn't rub it in. You made it darn clear that all you'd stand her society for was the chance of marrying Edna a little earlier," said Bill.

"Oh, rats!" said Julian. "First time I met Delight I was being given an engagement dinner by poor old Aunt Augusta. Nothing to that idea at all."

"Oh, very well. It is naught to muh. I want to see more of Glory with the red top. That's my idea of a real girl—and I don't run about telling her all the names in my fuss-book either. I have tact."

"Then use it and shut up," said Julian. "I want to plan a letter to Edna."

He wrote, not only to Edna, but to his mother, that night. And the next day he went up to New York to see her. She was used to Julian's irruptions, in a state of gay enthusiasm, about various things. But it seemed to her this time that under his gaiety he was pretty much in earnest.

It was from his mother that Julian got his charm, and a certain feeling that he gave you of dependability underneath it. People always liked and confided in Mrs. Leroy at sight, a fact which had rather annoyed her sister-in-law, Mrs Denegar, who thought that so inconsequently gay a person as Maud Leroy had been in her younger days was rather unworthy of such treatment. The younger days were gone now, and money worries and widowhood had taken a good deal of the gaiety. But people still felt impelled to tell Mrs. Leroy their troubles. There was nothing that ever happened to Julian that she did not hear as soon as he could tell her, naturally. She welcomed him into the sunny sitting-room of their little apartment, as if he were her lover.

"The best piece of luck!" he told her. "Mother, I've had an offer that may mean Edna and I can get married ever so much sooner. But I have an idea that it partly depends upon you."

"You wrote me that much," said his mother. "Now tell me the rest."

"Do you remember a girl named Delight Lanier, Aunt Augusta's secretary? I ran into her once, the time Aunt Augusta was giving that dinner for Edna and me. She seemed rather forlorn and meek, not

a bit like the one before that—you remember Miss Battis, how she was all over pins and needles? But somehow I remembered her—Delight, I mean. Well, night before last she and another girl came along and picked up Bill and me in their car, and drove us over to the house Delight's bought. And she wants an outdoor theater built, wants me to plan it and oversee the construction and all. I know I can do it—*that's* all right. But she wants Bill and me to stay at the house with her, and of course you for the chaperon. Edna, too. It would be a gorgeous lark. I think she's a little lonely, and it's natural she should turn to Aunt Augusta's people. Aunt Augusta got her out of a sort of an orphan school, she told me, so she hasn't any other relatives. I know you and Edna will like her. She and Edna are sure to take to each other like ducks to water." He stopped for want of breath, eyeing his mother eagerly, though he hadn't much doubt of her doing as he asked her. She usually did.

"I had a letter from her," his mother said when he stopped. "I remembered her too. It was a very nice letter. It seems natural, as you say, that she should ask Augusta's people to live with her. Your aunt left her all her money."

"Oh, I say! Was that the girl? Then she *can*

build theaters all up and down New England if she feels like it. Aunt Augusta showed her good sense for once. Her money's a lot better off with that pretty little girl than converting the Papuans, as she always told me she meant to leave it."


Mrs. Leroy said nothing whatever about that.

"I see no reason why I should not go," was all she answered.

"You angel, you!" cried Julian, hugging her tempestuously. "Now I know I'm all right. Edna's passing through town today on her way back to Wyndham. She won't have had Delight's letter yet. So you and I will go down and lunch her between trains, and vamp her into doing it."

There was no reason on earth why Mrs. Leroy should refuse to do this any more than the other. But she was thinking of a scene she had had with Edna, not long ago.

"She promised—that hateful old woman promised!" she had told Julian's mother furiously. "When she persuaded me to announce the engagement she told me everything was coming to Julian, and that she'd arrange things so for us that we could be married in the fall. Everybody knew Julian was her heir. She told you so. Everybody



knew it but him. And now this horrible secretary has wheedled her out of it. She ought to be dug up out of her grave and burned alive."

Which was why Mrs. Leroy had a little hesitancy about asking Edna to spend some months in the house of Delight Lanier.

"They're coming!" announced Delight, waving a letter. "All we have to do now is to pick out their rooms for them."

"Not at all," said Gloria coolly. "You have something far more important to pick out. We're a man short. Julian Leroy is a duck, but he's taken. Sharing Bill between us is a thought I don't think much of."

"Would you like to ask some friend of yours down, then?"

"Not unless you have nobody to suggest."

"Oh, I haven't," Delight told her placidly. "I never had any friends. Followers, to quote your phrase, weren't allowed in the Mary Lebaron. And you simply couldn't at Cousin Augusta's. You see, with her I was a secretary with the disabilities of a daughter."

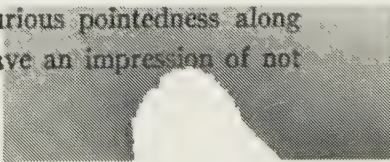
"I get you," said Gloria. "All right, I'll import a man. We needn't hurry, though—get the spindle

and the distaff ready and God will send the flax. Some charming person may turn up."

"I'm glad it doesn't have to be done this minute," Delight answered with relief.

Her relief was nothing to Dora's on discovering that Mrs. Leroy was coming to stay with them throughout the summer. She took it for granted that the charge of the house would be put in her hands. Delight said nothing, but determined to see what Julian's mother was like before she let go of any of her rights. She might be on the lines of her sister-in-law. She had met her a couple of times, but only for a moment. She had a vague recollection of height, and of a face and figure with gray hair too old for them.

She welcomed them very sweetly when they came. It was Julian and his mother, first. Bill and Edna arrived from Wyndham the following afternoon. Delight was a little at sea, at first, over Edna. She must in her own mind have expected her to walk in clad in the yellow evening gown as she had seen her last. Instead, Edna had on a smart little dark suit and a perky hat. But it was the same face she remembered, small, high-colored, with enormous black eyes and a curious pointedness along with its roundness. She gave an impression of not



only being infinitely sure of herself, but of being even more sure that she was superior to and much admired by others.

She made a good deal of fuss over Delight in a staccato way; rather less over Gloria, whom she apparently classed, at once, very cleverly, as a companion. Or perhaps somebody had told her.

CHAPTER VII

JULIAN, who had been establishing himself in his room with that frank pleasure which he always took in new experiences, came flying down the stairs to meet her, followed more slowly by his mother. He caught Edna in his arms without the slightest consciousness of anybody else present, and kissed her as if he hadn't seen her for a year. Delight half-shy, half-thrilled, could not help watching them. Julian's usually laughing face was grave with feeling as he flung his arms around Edna's shoulders. And for some reason the light in his eyes before he bent to kiss her gave Delight a choking, excited feeling, and her eyes filled with tears. It was as if she was looking at something too holy for her to see.

Edna did not seem to feel that it was holy. She kissed him back matter-of-factly, and turned to Mrs. Leroy with more effusion than she had shown to the others, addressing her, as Julian did, as Motherdy—short, it proved, for Mother dear, and an infant invention of Julian's which he had never been able to break himself of.

The greetings were soon over. Julian carried Bill off to show him his room, which was next his own. Delight and Mrs. Leroy took Edna to hers, and then leaving Mrs. Leroy with Edna, Delight went to find Gloria, who had said that she intended to look over the tennis-courts and see if they needed expert attention.

Sure enough, Gloria was with the tennis-courts. She was sitting meditatively on a damaged rustic bench, writing what seemed to be a list of tennis necessities. Or it might have been a letter.

"Well?" said she, looking up.

"Well?" echoed Delight.

"Well—they're here," said Gloria, offering a statement difficult to shake.

Delight couldn't help laughing a little.

"You know what I mean," she said.

"I'm not sure. But if you mean how do I like our inmates, I'll tell you. I'd give Julian and Bill a home forever. They're lambs. And I think Mrs. Leroy's a dear, though she may be a bit sentimental. Most middle-aged people are."

"You think most people of any age are," Delight interposed.

"They are," said Gloria, unruffled. "But to continue. I like the Leroy's, and Bill is the darling

of my heart, but—I—do—*not* fall for Edna Morse, the black-eyed lady-love. As an Imagist would say, she doesn't intrigue me. I don't think she likes girls at all. I'm not specially sure she likes the human race. But, oh, the devotion she has for Edna Morse! It makes up for all lacks in other directions. . . . But I think we'll find her agreeable. If she isn't agreeable to me, I'll get Bill, the childhood friend, to sit on her till she is—so that's all right."

Gloria stopped talking and resumed her fountain pen. She was writing to a sporting-goods store, Delight saw, for nets and balls and a croquet-set, not to mention golf-sticks.

"You'd better give me a check to put in the letter," she added.

"But, Gloria, *don't* you think she's nice? It would be dreadful to have our summer spoiled by someone that made things unpleasant. I thought it would be so wonderful to see people together that were lovers. And I thought it would make me so happy to see her and Julian loving each other."

"Well, it may," observed Gloria, "though as far as lovers go I'm just the other way from the Purple Cow man. I'd *much* rather be than see one. . . .



You said I could invite another man down here to make things even. I think I'll write tonight. Don't be frightened, I'll pick out one that's guaranteed inoffensive."

Delight shivered. "Oh, don't talk that way, Gloria. Ever since Cousin Augusta left me her money, everything's been so wonderful and so happy. Everybody, too. And I want to feel happy and comfortable with everybody. I can't if I feel that Edna Morse doesn't like me."

"I *didn't* say she didn't like you, particularly. I would simply class her as a certain kind of girl that's too wrapped up in herself to like anybody much. There's no reason why she shouldn't have an exceedingly friendly feeling for anyone who is giving her a delightful summer, free of expense, in the same house with her lover. I didn't mean to jar you, Delight. You always remind me of that line of Yeats', 'Tread softly, because you tread on my dreams.' I didn't mean to step on yours, dear child."

Gloria's odd, attractive, emerald-colored eyes looked up into Delight's wistful, childish, gray-blue ones with very real affection.

"Why—I believe you like me, Gloria!" she said involuntarily.

"My dear child," said Gloria, "if I hadn't liked you at sight, I would never have abandoned a flourishing Plaid Pup for your sake."

Delight colored up with happiness. "It seems like an impossibility, sometimes," she said, "the way the things I have wanted all my life have come to me. You know, Gloria, from the earliest time I can remember, I have lived more in my year-after-next dream than in realities. My actual life has never been actual to me. I have spent so many years in building up the people and things of my dreams that now I have come to make some of them realities, all the years I spent with Cousin Augusta and at the Mary Lebaron seem untrue, as if they were the imaginary part of my life, and the dreams had always been real."

"Sit down on the bench, Delight," Gloria suggested. "It tires my neck to look at you. Did you ever hear the theory that by wishing for a thing long enough and picturing it in your mind strongly you can make it come real? I don't believe in anything but work and a bit of luck now and then making things happen, myself. But I knew all sorts of queer people in the Village, and I've heard some of them say that."

Delight looked at her friend, startled. "You

mean I've made year-after-next come true by just planning it all those years? "

Gloria shrugged her shoulders. "*I don't think so. But I know people who would.*"

Delight laughed in a rather shaky way.

"It *is* all the way I planned it," she said in an awed voice. "Oh, Gloria, I can even remember planning the ride you and I took that ended at Bill's house, and picking up the boys! But—" she began to laugh,—“Edna Morse was *never* in any of my year-after-next stories.”

"All the better," said Gloria promptly. "Then perhaps kind Providence will remove her from our midst very speedily. And take care you don't ever put her in."

"Oh, but she's to make Julian happy. He wouldn't like it here without her," said Delight.

"All right. That settles it," said Gloria with a little gurgle of laughter. "Oh, Delight, nobody would believe in you that hadn't seen you. I always thought the last one of you was extinct in the 'fifties."

"I know I'm not like other girls," said Delight meekly. "I hoped you'd show me."

Before Gloria could answer, the other young people descended on them.

"We want tennis!" Bill and Julian announced in vociferous unison.

"Help yourselves," said Gloria. "But you'll have to imagine there's a net. We're just writing up for one."

"Oh, I brought one," said Bill. "My good Julian, just run back to the house and get it."

"I refuse to be torn from the side of my loved one," announced Julian, putting both arms unashamedly around Edna, who had changed to a silk skirt and blouse and a most becoming little green tam, and looked like a magazine cover of the chic and snappy kind. She did not seem at all disturbed by Julian's open embrace, any more than the other time. In fact, she gave forth an air of owning something worth while in Julian—and yet it wasn't quite an air of taking him seriously. It might have been her small brother climbing up in her lap.

"Well, I won't furnish it and get it both," said Bill firmly. Whereat Julian yielded sunnily.

"Come on, Edna. We'll get his old net for him," he said. But Edna wouldn't.

It ended in Julian's going alone, while Edna told Bill that she thought he was a pig in tones which came very near being serious. But as Bill continued to find the situation amusing no harm was

done, and when Julian came back with the net and other things they put it up amiably together, and Delight had her first lesson in tennis. After that Mrs. Leroy strolled out their way, followed in a few moments by the beaming Dora, with tea and little cakes. It was, altogether, the happiest time Delight had ever known; young people and friendliness and merriment, and the feeling of *belonging* that her forlorn little heart had always been so eager for. They sat and laughed and talked till the air began to grow chilly, as it neared sunset. Delight felt a gentle hand on her shoulder.

"You haven't been very well, dear child, Dora tells me. Till you are stronger, I'm afraid you'll have to be fussed over a bit. Hadn't you better come in and lie down a little while?" asked Mrs. Leroy gently.

Delight smiled gratefully.

"I will if you think I'd better," she said with her old docility.

"I'll go with you," said Mrs. Leroy, as if she hated taking a young thing away from her pleasures, and rose too.

Delight had never known that older people were as considerate as that. As they crossed the lawn to the house she thought with a smile at herself,

that Mrs. Leroy might very well have seemed, to anyone who knew her well and for whom she cared, the loving lady of the old dream. That she could care for *her* Delight could not suppose. But it was lovely to have her there, and feel her warm kindness, so like Julian's.

What the rest did till dinner-time she did not know. After dinner Julian proposed that they explore the house, ending their explorations with a swim; for he and Bill had found time to discover not only the pool in the basement, but the way to fill it, which the girls had supposed would be the work of many days and many plumbers.

"But we did explore, Delight and I," Gloria objected. "All we found was the linen room and a Captain's shoulder-bar."

"All the more reason why the ground should be gone over by experts," retorted Julian. "There are very likely two or three more linen rooms and bars belonging to a whole regiment, that you have missed."

So they went over the house again, starting in an orderly manner with the cellar, which actually yielded a hitherto undiscovered closet, very damp-smelling, in which were a lone Indian club, a flat-iron, and three clothes-pins.

"Treasure trove, indeed!" said Delight. "Findings keepings! We'll give them to you, Julian, for a present."

Julian shook his head. "All treasure-trove belongs to the owner of the house," he insisted. "That's your flatiron, Delight. I refuse to accept it."

"If you don't hurry up, we'll never get back in time for a swim before bedtime," reminded Bill.

Julian regretfully deserted his flatiron, and clattered upstairs with the rest.

The ground floor yielded no new treasures. Neither did the second, though Julian and Bill went ceremonially through all the bedrooms, pulling out all the furniture, and rapping the walls for secret closets. They said they had seen it done in the movies and knew how perfectly well. Only it would have taken them less time if they had not stopped every so often so say "Hist!" to each other; and on being said "Hist!" to, crawled stealthily to another spot in the room under investigation before they began their tapping again. This delayed the end of their pilgrimage by a good half-hour.

"We've been over the attic *much* more thoroughly

than you possibly ever can—even if you crawl on all-fours for hours,” said Gloria disdainfully.

“I don’t care,” said Delight joyously. “I love hunting in attics.”

“That’s the stuff,” said Julian, catching her hand and running up the attic stairs. Gloria looked after Delight a little apprehensively—running upstairs wasn’t especially good for anemia, as far as she could tell. But Delight was flushed and laughing, and they raced together to the top, where all five dropped in a hilarious heap.

“I’ll take this end, you take that, Bill,” called Julian. “The girls can have the sides.”

The girls, who didn’t believe much in undiscovered hiding-places, hunted languidly. The men, on the contrary, were burrowing joyously into the eaves, armed with a flashlight apiece.

“I’m going downstairs. This game bores me to death,” said Edna, shaking herself free of dust in a way that was somehow reminiscent of a cat putting herself in order.

“Oh, wait just a little longer, and we’ll all go down together . . .” Delight was saying, when she was interrupted by a howl from Julian.

“Here’s a door, under the eaves, nailed down! Bill, Edna, somebody, go get me a hammer!”

They crowded about him, all but Delight, who ran for the hammer, and Mrs. Leroy, feeling that something exciting *was* happening that nobody should miss. Mrs. Leroy was excited as the rest, picked up her skirts and a candle, and ran up too.

Julian had not waited for the hammer. He was digging out the nails with a jackknife, and had three out by the time the hammer arrived. This he fell on with cries of joy, and assisted by Bill with the jackknife, had the little door unnailed in five breathless minutes.

"The mountains trembled and there came forth a mouse," Bill quoted in an impressive tone, emphasizing *mouse* deeply, and the women screamed. It was all too likely. They gave the little door a couple of masterful jerks, and Bill put his head in, also his flashlight.

"There *is* something!" he said. "It glitters."

"Nonsense," said Gloria, "Captain Kidd's treasure wouldn't be in a nice new house like this."

"I never said it was Captain Kidd's treasure," retorted Bill, crawling intrepidly into the low closet and pulling out the thing that glittered. It was a hammered brass chest. Neither more nor less. The lid was closed but not locked.

"They were very fashionable as wedding-presents

about five years ago," volunteered Mrs. Leroy.

"Open it, Delight."

"Shall I?" she hesitated.

"If you won't I will," said Edna, voicing the sentiment of all present. Urged by everybody, Delight knelt and pushed back the lid.

The first things she touched were a pair of beautiful old china candlesticks.

"They'll be lovely for your bedroom, Delight," Gloria cried as she set them on the floor.

Next, tossed in anyhow, was a girl's corduroy coat.

"Tango color," said Gloria. "I remember those. I was a flapper, and they said I shouldn't wear it, and I did."

Delight laid it softly to one side. She looked grave. Then came a big, brown, fuzzy teddy-bear, with glass eyes and a tango-colored bow at its neck.

"What a queer bunch of things," said Julian, frowning at them. "They don't piece together."

"I think they do," said Delight, who had turned very quiet. She lifted out a long chain of large black beads, a volume of poems, and last of all, a crumpled smoke-blue evening frock. She bent down. At the very bottom lay a post-card photograph of two people. The girl had a laughing, childish little

face, sweet and not very strong. The man, smiling too, was tall and fair, with a certain strength and gentleness in his face. Delight passed it silently to the others.

"Those were the bride and groom this house was built for, five years ago," she said. "I think this was taken before they were married. The teddy was one he gave her. See, its bow matches her coat—she carried it. It's the kind that has lights for eyes. The book was a poetry one he gave her. He gave her the necklace, too. And, after they'd been married two years, he went away and was killed. I think this was the dress she wore when she said good-by to him." Delight held it up. There was a tear on the shoulder. "And when she was married again she put everything in the box and nailed up the door on it. She didn't want to throw them away, and she didn't want to have them around to remind her."

"Fool girl," said Edna.

"What are you going to do with them?" demanded Julian.

"Put them back, I think," Delight said.

He nodded. "Yes, I would."

He bent over the box to a shrill outcry from Edna.

"I think that's ridiculous! Those things be-

long to you. If you don't want that brass chest I'll take it."

"I know they belong to me," said Delight quietly, "and I'm putting them back. I wouldn't disturb them any more than I would a grave."

"No more would I," Julian backed her up shortly. He pushed the box back and shut the door. "Come on, folks, let's go swimming."

They trooped down again to their rooms, to hunt for bathing-suits. Delight lingered a little and picked up the forgotten post-card from the floor.

"He was a nice man," she said wistfully to Mrs. Leroy. "I'm sorry he is dead."

She laid the picture on her dressing-table and got into her bathing-suit. She forgot all about the picture in the novelty of gamboling in the water. Julian showed her how to regulate the flow, and the amount of warm water, before he let her begin to paddle about. There was a continual flow of new water in and out. And they all had a delightful time.

"Now don't you think it was a lovely idea to have them all for the summer?" she demanded of Gloria as they said good-night.

"I do, up to now," said Gloria. "Delight, you're a darling. But so far, you're only ten."

Delight did not know what she meant, but it sounded affectionate. So she let it go at that.

Two things happened the day after next. The first thing was that the post-card picture of the bride and bridegroom, as everybody had drifted into speaking of them, disappeared from Delight's dressing-table, where it had lain in plain sight, weighed down by an ivory buffer. When Delight mentioned it at luncheon, Edna said coolly that she had taken it.

"I've cut off the bride, and put the bridegroom in a spiffy silver frame, and he's hanging on my wall. I'm going to keep him till Julian and I go away. Then you can have him back," she said with perfect calm.

Julian regarded her with admiration, mingled with a little perplexity. He obviously considered her cute to the last degree, but wasn't quite sure Delight would think it polite. Delight saw this, and stopped herself from indignantly demanding her property again. After all, they were people she had never seen, and if it was Edna's whim to frame the bridegroom and throw the bride away, it really wasn't a serious matter.

The second happening wasn't particularly serious either. It was the arrival of Gloria's friend, a

neat, round-faced young man named Derouledé Mason, who, fortunately for the comfort of all concerned, was usually addressed as Derry. He was invited nominally for the week-end, but if he showed signs of fitting in he was to be asked to stay. As he was one of those inconspicuous, pleasant people who are always nice to everybody, but not thrilling enough for anyone to be jealous over, it seemed to Delight that he was an ideal completion of the party. She asked him to stay on, and after thinking it over just enough for manners, he stayed.

He did not pair off with anybody. He was an artist, and quietly took possession of a small summer-house in the garden, as quietly hired what models he wanted from the village, and worked every day from ten to two. He and Julian got on excellently, having a good deal of art in common, though Derry was much the elder.

If he spent more time with one person than with another it was with Mrs. Leroy. But then young men gravitated to Mrs. Leroy as naturally as cats to cat-haters—though Mrs. Leroy by no means hated young men. She mothered them with a sparkle of femininity thrown in that made them treat her like a queen.

Julian, meanwhile, began his plans for the outdoor theater, assembled his workmen, acquired his materials, and set enthusiastically to work, which meant that he, too, was unavailable as a playmate except part of the time. Bill, being, to quote Gloria, a cowardly copy-cat like everything male, bethought him of his forthcoming year at Sheffield, and took horn spectacles and a pile of mathematical books to a corner of the library, dwelling with them what time his fellow-men were respectively drawing village maidens and supervising the digging of foundations.

Delight liked the way things went. Mrs. Leroy had taken over the management of the house after all, so completely and noiselessly that one scarcely realized anything but the smooth-going of affairs. The neighbors were beginning to call, especially the summer people, who were filtering into their houses a few at a time. Already there were pleasant informal teas on Delight's porch and other people's porches. There was plenty to do in the mornings without calling on the men to leave their adored tasks. Even Gloria said that half a day was all that you could be expected to bear up under boys, and went back to art-studies herself, beginning on the kitchen cat, whom she did after the Futurist

method, in lavender paralellograms. Only Edna was restless, and fretted. She was, it seemed to Delight, a little difficult. It wasn't as if Julian hadn't spent every moment with Edna that he could take from his beloved theater. To be sure he obviously did love the theater, and the business of its construction. But he frankly loved Edna, too, and Delight remembered, as she was sure Edna remembered, too, that Julian planned to be able to marry Edna as a result of his earnings from the building of the theater. Delight herself was happy just to be in the midst of the group of young people, to feel the thrill of being swept off on the expeditions that Bill or Gloria or Julian was always getting up, to feel Mrs. Leroy's loving gentleness in the background, and the excitement of Julian's laughter and joy-giving presence. Something seemed to be happening all the time. She had joined the nearest country club, which meant that their circle of acquaintances had increased still more and that there were dances. People were always dropping in and out of the place. It wasn't as if Edna hadn't everything a girl could want for an excellent summer. But she fretted and visibly nagged Julian, who stood it with his accustomed sweetness, but went on with the theater till

luncheon every day, and sometimes after luncheon if a foreman summoned.

The thing culminated in an open and—it seemed to old-fashioned Delight—a very unmannerly explosion one lovely June evening. They had decided to begin rehearsing a couple of plays, to be given on the completion of the new theater, and they had asked a half-dozen of the men and girls of the neighborhood to come in and plan with them. They were to dance afterwards, and have something to eat. It promised to be an excellent evening, and Edna was vivid in the orange evening frock Delight remembered of old. She had Julian a little apart; they were talking and laughing together. She seemed to be doing her best to keep him from joining in the general conversation about the play, and Delight knew that in a moment some earnest-minded soul was going to pounce upon them and bring them back into the discussion. But Julian seemed to be so happy that she hoped it wouldn't happen for a little while yet.

What did happen was that one of the maids came in, with—

“Mr. Barton would like to speak to you, please, Mr. Leroy.” Barton was the foreman, and Julian

jumped up as though the Pied Piper had whistled for him.

"It's something about plans, sir. He says he can't go on till you've showed him about something."

"I'll be right there," said Julian briskly. "Back in a minute, folks."

But Edna made an outcry. "I don't see why you have to build that old thing all day and all night, too. Send him away till tomorrow. The play's much more important."

"Well, we can't very well give it without a theater to give it in," remarked Julian with cheerful justice. "Before you've decided on the very first step of what you're going to do I'll be back, if I know anything about getting up plays." And he went out to the allurements of Barton and the plans.

Time went on, and the discussion came to an end, and they started the phonograph and began dancing. And still no Julian—and Edna was still crosser.

"I believe you started your old theater so he couldn't take time to enjoy himself," she said to Delight, like a cross child, and flounced out of the room. Delight's eyes filled with tears. It was the first shadow on her happiness. Why—did grown

women talk that way, in this new world she had found?

Time continued to go on. Julian came gaily back from his foreman, and by means of pushing and pulling something was almost decided on; a compromise between highbrow souls who wanted to give, so Gloria described it, "One of those plays that aren't written to be given," and lower ones who wanted a society circus. The compromise consisted of a decision to give first Yeats' "Land of Heart's Desire," and after that a vaudeville performance. There was one final dance. After everyone had gone, Julian's gaiety dropped like a cloak from him.

"Where's Edna, Delight?" he asked. "Gone to bed?"

Delight shook her head. "I don't think so, but I'll send and find out."

She sent and found no sign of Edna in her room.

"You never know what the little imp will do when she's on her high horse," Julian said, trying to speak lightly. "Do you mind helping me look for her? She may be in the grounds somewhere. We could each take one end of it. Nobody else noticed her going, I think—it's no use worrying Mother."

CHAPTER VIII

THEY started at different parts of the grounds, hunting carefully. Julian obviously wanted as few people as possible to know of Edna's waywardness. Delight felt heartachingly sorry for him. It seemed so unfair that anyone like Julian should be treated that way.

"I'm sorry, Julian," she ventured as they crossed once in their search. "But it's because she is so fond of you."

Julian's face lightened.

"Thank you, Delight, you're a dear to say that," he responded warmly. "After all, Edna wouldn't be so much of a winner if she had less of the devil in her."

Delight wondered if that was true. If you behaved exactly as you wanted to, did people like it better? As in her childhood, she thought it over and decided that however excellently it might work for others she would never have the courage. At least not all the time. Perhaps at some crucial moment she might manage it.

"I don't think she's here," she told Julian as they met for the third time.

"There's nowhere else for her to be, unless she's hidden in one of the attics," he answered with the worried look coming back to his face. "That sort of thing isn't like her."

"Perhaps we'd better go in."

"Perhaps we had," he acquiesced. Then, with that quick sweetness of his, "You're a comfort, Delight. You understand things so, without having people tell you."

She colored up. That was worth having Edna snap at her twice over—to be told that. They were turning to go back to the house and Julian lingered to sweep his flashlight once more over a clump of trees.

"I suppose it's silly to look for her as though she were a kid," he observed wistfully.

It was at this moment that they heard a shriek, and Edna came running frantically toward them, throwing herself in Julian's arms.

"The bridegroom! The bridegroom! I saw his ghost!" she shrieked, and began to cry hysterically.

Julian may have been a little tired out with Edna's performances. The fact remains that in-

stead of holding her tenderly in his embrace, and soothing her, he gave her a little shake.

"Don't talk nonsense!" he said. He may have known the best way to deal with her. At least, she stopped her sobbing, though she never released him.

"I did! I did!" she insisted. "He looked just like the postal card, only he had on flannels instead of a dark suit. And he walked down the path between the lilacs and faced me. He's angry because Delight opened the box. Oh, come on back to the house! Come back to the house!"

Julian laughed. "Why, that's no way to treat a ghost!" he said. "Go on back to the house, Edna—Delight will go with you—and I'll hunt up his ghostship." But Edna was frantic with terror, and the end of it was that she went back with him to where the ghost of her describing had been, rather than be separated from him.

"What good would another girl be with a ghost?" she demanded, which made Julian more amused than ever. But Delight knew exactly how she felt. A man was really much more of a comfort in such a situation. Especially if you didn't much like the girl.

So, Delight and all, they retraced their steps the

way Edna had come, almost to the boundaries of the grounds.

"Now you see there really wasn't anything, you foolish little girl," Julian told her. "Let's go back to the house. I'm tired to death—Barton was as stubborn as a mule."

"I knew you wouldn't find anything," Edna said sullenly. "Ghosts don't hang around to be arrested, like tramps."

"Shows their good sense," said Julian cheerfully. Delight, who had been very quiet, gave a faint cry.

"I don't think it's a ghost, but I certainly see somebody," she said. "Some man, I suppose. Perhaps he doesn't know anybody lives here."

"I see it too," said Julian, while Edna uttered another shriek.

There was certainly a tall white figure coming toward them, leisurely. But as it was smoking a cigar, Delight did not feel that it was the ghost of the bridegroom—though when she said so to Julian afterwards, he proved to her that there was no more reason why a cigar should be unghostly than a pair of flannel trousers should.

"But it was lighted," Delight protested.

Whereat Julian grinned. "He might be in a position to get a light without any trouble," he said.

But just now the cigar was a great comfort. But when they met the man, who halted at once, it was Delight who screamed and started. Edna was perfectly right in one thing. He did look like the photograph. But he was unquestionably flesh and blood, a wandering gentleman at large.

Delight had read about such things in books. She expected, rather, that Julian would say sternly, "Sir, you are trespassing!" But Julian's first remark was quite otherwise.

"You don't mind owning up that you're not a ghost, do you?" he addressed the mysterious stranger in a friendly and winning tone.

"Not in the least," said the stranger quite as genially. "But I'm afraid," he went on with a little concern in his voice, "that I'm where I have no business to be. I ought to have looked for lights. Are you occupying the house over there?"

"Miss Lanier, here, bought it a month ago. Miss Morse and I are staying with her," Julian explained.

"I'm sorry," said the stranger courteously, while Edna, freed from her terror, eyed him with frank admiration.

"I thought it was still vacant, as it has been for some time past. My brother lived here."

The likeness was explained simply enough. And

when you came to see him closely the bridegroom's brother was not so vividly like him as first Edna, and then Delight, had thought in the deceptive shadows and moonlight. He was darker, and his face was, perhaps, less regularly handsome, but stronger.

"Oh, I'm so glad you're real!" Edna said. "You know, I had what, I thought, was your photograph framed on my wall. And I thought—oh, I thought you were haunting me, because you were angry!"

"That doesn't sound like the sort of thing I ought to be angry about," he answered, falling into step with her.

"Won't you come up to the house and meet Mrs. Leroy? I know she's up yet," Edna went on, while Delight looked surprised. She didn't think Edna had any business doing that sort of thing.

"Why—if you don't think it's too unearthly an hour, Miss Lanier," he answered. "I would like to see the house again. I was very fond of my brother."

Delight could not help a half-suppressed smile. The stranger's unconscious rebuke was so neat. Julian colored up a little, but it passed over Edna's head.

"Oh, *I'm* not Miss Lanier. I'm Edna Morse." At this the ex-mysterious stranger said in effect that his mother was waiting up, and perhaps he'd better go home now. Whereat Delight and Julian closed around him and dragged him to the house. Mrs. Leroy was up, as they had known she would be—she was a night-owl by preference. And she was as cordial as they had likewise known she would be.

His name was Stevenson. He was older than any of the rest of them—about thirty—very quiet, very gentle, very much at ease—and before he had ended his brief midnight call every one of the household had gone down before him, from hard little Edna to unimpressionable Derry. They escorted him to the front door in a body, having elicited from him a promise to come the next day and bring his mother with him. They had a summer place here for years, it seemed.

"*Isn't* that man a charmer!" exclaimed Gloria, when the door was shut on him, and they were settling down to their bedtime talk. "If he comes around this house much longer we're all going to be madly in love with him. And much good it will do us! He takes women too easily to be much interested in them."

"He seemed very nice," said Delight equably. "Easy to get along with, as you say. But I don't think he's any more attractive than the other boys." And she went to bed.

"If you feel that way about him you may win him," Gloria called into the dark from her adjoining room.

Whether it was because he liked the house for old times' sake, or for the sake of the three pretty girls, who seemed to be a focus for the summer people's good times, Everett Stevenson spent a great deal of his time at Delight's. To be sure, so did a number of other people. Open house, abundant hospitality, a group of gay girls and men, and amateur theatricals in prospect, made Delight's home the place she had dreamed of. Sometimes when she thought how exactly she had carried out her old day-dream, she felt frightened. At other times it seemed simply that she'd known what she wanted and kept on till she had it. Of course, there were one or two things not on the cards, such as Edna Morse's rudenesses—though Edna said pretty much what she pleased to everyone—and Everett Stevenson's devotion. Derry, as a pairer-off, had been a failure. He fitted into the house-party admirably, as a background and general easer of things. But

he had never played with Delight any more than with the other girls. He spent more time with Mrs. Leroy, indeed, than with anyone else. Fellows who hadn't mothers generally did, Julian elucidated one day carelessly, but with a light of pride in his eye. But Everett Stevenson was fully provided with mothers, and whether it was a sister he felt the need of, or no, he certainly attached himself to Delight. She did not realize that he liked her especially. She had never had a lover. And he, very naturally, never realized that this pretty, gay girl, rich, beautifully dressed, the center of the household and of the neighborhood's gaities, could be as inexperienced in the ways of the world as a nun. It was fortunate that Delight was of the type that undervalues, not overvalues any affection. She liked Everett Stevenson very much and turned to him gladly for the friendship which a man, if he wishes, can give a woman—a friendship having something about it that the closest affection for another girl cannot give. He knew so many things, he had been in so many places, and he was so kind and wise, that it seemed to Delight wonderful that he should find her of interest. She decided at length that it was because she liked to talk to him of his dead brother, the first owner of the house.

The brother—she still called him “the bridegroom” in her mind—became as real to her as though she had known him.

Everett had been the younger of the two by a little over a year, and he had worshiped his brother. Marriage had made no difference in the close bond between them. He did not speak much to Delight of the bride, but from what he said she got the impression of a light-hearted, demonstrative little thing, easy to get on with, and from what Everett said, the kind of a girl who would be fond of anyone who was fond of her.

“She liked John a lot,” he said without malice. “I fancy she likes the other man she married a lot, too. Some people are like that. They give love easily.”

They were in the garden together, where Delight had met him first, on a bench in the shade of a great tree. There was a bed of old-fashioned white pinks by them, and Delight bent to pick some as she answered him.

“Don’t you think people ought to give love easily? Not if everyone is kind to them?”

He held out his hand half-absently for a flower and she laid it in his palm, coloring a little.

“I don’t think there’s much question of ‘ought’

about it," he said musingly. "You're made a certain way or you're not.

*'To say why gals do so and so
Or not, would be presumin','*

you know. My masculine vanity, of course, would make me prefer a woman who didn't love me just because I was on the spot! "

"She couldn't very well begin, at any rate, unless you were," said Delight meditatively, but with a little smile. "I don't know, though. She might find your picture or a picture that was like you, put it on the wall and build up all sorts of romances about it. She might . . ."

Delight stopped with a horrified tide of color sweeping up to her hair. She had been talking at random. But that was what Edna had done! How fearful if Everett thought that she was making trouble for Edna!

But he never seemed to think of that. He only smiled and his steady eyes lighted, Delight thought, as if he were contented and pleased about something. She, too, felt gently happy. Everett was very pleasant to talk to—she never came up against the little mocking hardness in him that she did in Gloria.

"Ah, but that would not necessarily be giving

love easily," he said. "It would only be giving it romantically. It might be a whim that would fade out five minutes after the girl and man met, or it might be one of those unusual, but none the less possible cases where the love on both sides wakes at first sight and lasts a lifetime. To disbelieve in the possibility of any kind of occurrence at all, where love is concerned, is to my mind simply to be lacking in imagination."

Delight looked at him wonderingly. She was wondering if she would be able to talk about love as easily and quietly as that when she was Everett Stevenson's age. And then the recollection caught her like a dagger-thrust. She would never be as old as Everett Stevenson. She would never be older than twenty-two. *Now* was all there was.

She leaned forward, catching her breath by an effort, and laughing up into the man's eyes. What blind instinct moved her she did not know. All she knew was that this was a delightful moment, in spite of a vague something lacking, and that she wanted to make it as intense as she could, and as lasting.

"You are very wise about love," she murmured, with a half-laugh in her voice. "Who taught you so much?"

He bent a little toward her, smiling too, looking into her eyes as if he saw something fathoms below them. There was a long pause as if he had forgotten to speak.

And then, before he answered, Edna's little flying figure flung itself toward them. Her cheeks were scarlet, and her whole air that of anger. Everett raised his eyes from Delight's and greeted the newcomer with his usual pleasant calm.

"You seem to be in a hurry, Edna. It *must* seem long, when your true love is all wrapped up in work, and you're outside. You know you can't detach Julian from his beloved planks and plans till he's willing. Your best scheme is to sit down and talk to us."

Delight, knowing Edna's temper, and especially noticing that it was conspicuously with her, expected her to fly at Everett for his piece of impertinence. Nothing of the sort happened.

"I can get on without Julian for the moment," she told Everett coolly, and sat down—which, curiously enough, Everett did not seem prepared for. And having sat down, which crowded the bench badly, she remained in absolute silence.

Presently—"There was something important that Dora wanted to ask you about, Delight," she said.

Delight rose, of course. So did Everett, as if to detain her.

"Wasn't it curious?" Delight asked Gloria a few hours later.

"No," said Gloria flatly, and said no more. "But he shook her in about two minutes, and came hunting the house over for you," she went on.

Delight looked a little puzzled, and then laughed.

*"To say why gals do so and so
Or not, would be presumin',"*

she said.

"What has that to do with it?" asked Gloria.

"Not much. Only it was what he said. We were talking about love, and it just happened. Isn't it strange, his being so like his brother's picture? It makes me feel better about owning the house. Do you know, he said he was glad we were here. He said he thought his brother would be pleased at the idea of a lot of young people being so happy where he had been so happy. . . . I wish Edna hadn't stolen that post-card and cut it up. It doesn't seem like a polite thing to do to anybody's photograph."

"Edna isn't polite," said Gloria needlessly.

"No. . . . But what does Edna matter? It's a wonderful, heavenly afternoon in a wonderful, heavenly summer. Pretty soon the boys will come back from fishing and we'll have tennis, and then tea, and then we're going out to dinner at the Stevensons', and life just goes on being the loveliest thing in the world! "

"How you do get pleasure out of everything! " Gloria said.

Delight smiled. "I have to. This is all the summer I shall ever have, this side of Paradise. They taught us all sorts of things about the beauty of heaven when I was little, but they never said anything about tennis, or dances—or having men make a fuss over you. . . . It doesn't matter, you see, if Everett Stevenson makes love to me without meaning a word of it. It doesn't matter what people say or think or do. . . . It's rather a nice way to be."

Delight smiled dreamily off into the distance as she spoke. But Gloria flung both arms around her.

"Oh, Delight, Delight, don't talk that way! The doctor may have been all wrong. You may live to be as old as the hills—don't you know you may? "

Delight shook her head, smiling. "I think it would rather put me out, now," she said. "Every-

thing is arranged on a short-time schedule, so to speak. If I thought I was going to go on, it might turn real. Now it's a sort of a wonderland. I shall never be old, never be unhappy, never go through all the tragedies and disappointments and sorrows that everybody else in this house has ahead of them. Never . . ."

"Oh, stop that, Delight!" said Gloria. "You're not living in a wonderland at all. You're in a real world with real people, and you've probably put currents of action in motion that may go on for fifty years yet. You've brought a lot of us here together and you may have changed things entirely for five-sixths of us. And besides that, I mayn't be sentimental, but I have human feelings, and it certainly is hard on them to hear you talking about death and destruction in this carefree, not to say ghoulish, manner. Have a heart!"

Delight looked a little ashamed of herself.

"I know I shouldn't. I wasn't playing the game. Only . . . only sometimes it's a comfort to think the game is only for counters, not for real coin. Suppose—you know I'm sentimental, Gloria—suppose I were breaking my heart over—say—Bill?" She flashed a mischievous look at her friend. "Don't you see what a pleasant thought it would be that

I could merely bask in his society and know that I couldn't marry him, anyway? "

"If you wanted Bill," said Gloria indignantly, "I would see to it that he married you tomorrow, before the nearest Justice of the Peace. You need only say the word."

"I'm glad I don't know that particular word," retorted Delight. "It would be hard on Bill. No Sheffield course, no glorious freedom . . ."

The two girls had encountered one another at the top of the stairs, and inconsequently sat down on the top steps to talk. They were not as much in the way of traffic as this sounds, because nearly everyone who frequented the front stairs were elsewhere, the men off on a fishing expedition, and Edna out somewhere in the runabout, which she drove very well, and used a good deal. So it hadn't occurred to them to move. They could hear Mrs. Leroy whistling softly to herself below somewhere—it was one of her inconsequently young ways—and her quick, light footsteps moving about.

"She's a dear, isn't she? " said Delight, breaking a short silence. Gloria nodded.

"Yes. Usually by the time they get as old as that they're not real people; they're just something that has settled down in a rut and talks to you

across it,—no, I guess what they talk across is a gulf, but the principle is the same. She doesn't, though."

"Sh!" said Delight, for Mrs. Leroy was running up the stairs, singing under her breath as she came. She turned a smiling face up to the girls.

"Don't move," she called, "I can pass." And she suddenly stopped as she spoke, leaning against the wall and turning white. She seemed scarcely to have strength to support herself. Both girls were beside her in a moment, helping her to sit down on the stairs; Gloria hurried for a glass of water, while Delight kept her arm around her and fanned her with a newspaper Gloria had snatched from the nearest bedroom and flung down to them, before she ran for the water.

Before she was back Mrs. Leroy was all right again, smiling and making light of her seizure.

"It's only a silly way my heart has of performing once in a while," she explained. "I haven't any business to run upstairs, that's the long and short of it, and I do it, and *then* I get a sharp reminder that I shouldn't. It isn't usually anything at all."

She rose to her feet and continued her interrupted way up the stairs.

"Well, folks, what is it—a stair party?" called

Julian from the doorway, where he and the other men were tramping in, sunburned, dirty, and exceedingly fishy.

"For Heaven's sake, girls," his mother whispered hurriedly, "don't breathe a word to Julian. He's a perfect scare-cat about what he calls, in capital letters you can almost see, my Heart. If he knew I'd run upstairs and had to stop for breath, I wouldn't be allowed to go out for a walk for months to come."

Gloria looked at Delight, and Delight looked at Gloria, but they both gave the required promise. Just in time, for Julian was up the stairs in two leaps, looking searchingly at them. Fortunately his interrogation took no more unanswerable form than "Are you all right, Motherdy? Didn't you come up too fast?"

"Nothing like as fast as you did," she retorted. "Of course I'm all right. And now please remember that you have to dress for dinner, and that it really means dressing for dinner when we go to the Stevensons'. Everett hasn't any easy-going old mother like yours. She makes him dress as he should."

"Easy-going! Good gracious, I wish you were!" exclaimed her son. "Instead of that you run around

as if you were ten. I wonder I'm not gray before my time, keeping you in order. All right—I'll go."

But he lingered for all that. He plainly intended to talk privately to Delight or Gloria, or both. But his mother as plainly saw that he did, for she went a little way down the hall, and then turned sharp around and came back, pouncing on him.

"Time you dressed," she said again peremptorily, and slipped her arm through his, carrying him off. She gave him a little half-playful push into his room, laughed, and left him. The girls, still on the stairs, watched her going down the hall with her light girlish tread, and looked at each other once more.

"It must be serious, if he takes it like that," was Delight's conclusion.

Gloria nodded.

"Yes, Julian isn't the sort to make mountains out of molehills. Goodness, what a lot of gloomy things to discuss in one summer afternoon! Come along, Delight, we ought to be getting dressed as much as the boys."

Delight followed her slowly. She had not known how much she had come to care for Mrs. Leroy till the thought of her being ill came up. Somehow the old thought that she would not live as long as Mrs. Leroy did, was little comfort. She could not

bear to think of Julian without the mother who was so like him and who was so much to him. And she could not bear to think of the world with no Cousin Maud in it. She wondered if it would be wrong to leave Julian and his mother more than their share of the money. She had never before considered much who it would go to. The feeling seemed to be, as far as Delight could tell from Dora and Julian and the doctor, that if Cousin Augusta hadn't left her money as she did, it would have gone to colleges and orphanages. But it might have gone to the Leroys, at least a part. She hurried through her dressing, and went out in the hall to waylay Julian and ask him what he thought, before she forgot.

CHAPTER IX

SHE succeeded excellently. Julian came out of his room, very much dressed for the evening. He had even, with a view to impressing his mother with his point-deviceness, found a ridiculously large bouquet of white flowers somewhere, and fastened them in his buttonhole. He was laughing at the effect to himself as he came out of his door. She went up to him, laying her hand on his arm in her earnestness.

"Julian, there's a question I want to ask you. If Cousin Augusta hadn't left her money to me, where would she have left it?"

He smiled down at her.

"That's a wonderful question! She might have left it almost anywhere. She always told me, as a matter of fact, that she had worked out a magnificent system for putting public schools all through Borneo. I understand that was where most of it was going. Of course the legacies would probably have been the same in any event. We got from five to ten thousand apiece all round."

"Then . . ." began Delight.

"Then—why, nobody knows a thing about then. I am certainly as glad as I can be that it came to a nice little cousin with blue eyes, instead of a wholly unappreciative bunch of woolly natives."

She looked at him searchingly. He spoke in absolute good faith and the sunniest of good nature.

"You are a dear, Julian!" she breathed. "And"—she lighted up, with that instant quickening of gaiety and buoyancy which a moment's speech with him always gave her—"you have a beautiful bouquet. I never saw anyone so dressed up."

"Yes, the cat with the two tails that they talk so much about in New England hereabouts isn't in it, is he? It's to please mother. She thinks I don't dress enough to do her honor, or so I gather. This should cheer her. . . . See here, Delight, tell me the truth; had she been having one of her heart-spells there on the stairs?"

He came at it so suddenly that Delight had not time to look unconcerned.

"What heart-spells?" was all she could think to say.

"Her heart-spells. The ones she has if she runs upstairs or hears anything disagreeable. Is this the first time you've heard of them?"

Delight was in a bad dilemma. She had prom-

ised Julian's mother not to tell him about the attack on the stairs. But she would rather have done anything else in the world than lie to Julian.

"Not the first," she said doubtfully. "But I didn't realize they were serious. Just now on the stairs she seemed out of breath—I don't believe it was bad, for she got it again in a minute. But after this I'll take more care of her. She's so gay and girlish it's hard to realize there's anything wrong."

"Good girl," said Julian. She was glad to find that she had deflected him. "Now let's rout the others out. We ought to have been on our way ages ago. And where on earth is Edna?"

"She took the car and went out," Delight explained. Without her knowing it her face shadowed a little. "She may have come in by now; you know she comes and goes without saying much about it."

He nodded.

"Yes, I know she does. You see, she's done just about what she pleased all her life."

"So has Gloria," was on Delight's tongue, but she held it back because of the rest of the sentence which would have been, "but she's considerate."

"I'll hunt her up if you like," she volunteered

instead, which was very forbearing of her; because Edna disliked being hunted up and was likely to say so.

"Not a bit of it," he said. "I'll find her myself. It's easier for me to hound her than it is for you."

This was quite true; so Delight said no more. She telephoned to the chauffeur, whom she had lately brought down from a life of ease and dignity in New York, along with the gold-monogrammed limousine, to be at the door in ten minutes. It wasn't far to the Stevensons', but the lateness she had already achieved for her party needed every bit of grace that a car could bestow. Then she went down and sat on the porch to think.

It did seem as if what Gloria had said was true. These were real people with real problems, that she had gathered under the bride's roof. Gloria's problem—she could see that Gloria, Bill, and Derry Mason were three sides of a triangle. That wasn't anything that particularly mattered, though. Anybody as delightful as Gloria Jackson was bound to have lovers. Derry seemed to Delight, who knew practically nothing about men, to be too slow and stolid to mind much if he did not win out with Gloria. As for Bill, he was too light-hearted to have

it go very deep. They were both interested in Gloria, Delight was pretty sure of that; and Gloria, from the way she had spoken about problems, was puzzling about it. But it all seemed so gay and like a comedy that Delight couldn't take it very hard. She put that aside.

The Leroy's' problems seemed harder. Heart-trouble for Cousin Maud—there isn't *anything* you can do about heart-trouble, except to spare the person concerned all the care and worry you possibly can. She wondered if the housekeeping was too much of a burden, and decided, subject to a consultation with Julian, that it was not. Mrs. Leroy liked doing it, that could be seen plainly. And with Dora and her well-trained staff the thing practically did itself. She could ask Julian what he thought, at least. And she resolved furthermore that if there was ever any sacrifice she could make to spare Cousin Maud, she would make it. No one, in her remembrance, had ever been so kind to her. Gloria was very good to her, and very fond of her, but Mrs. Leroy gave Delight all the mothering she had ever known and she responded to it with a passionate gratitude. Sometimes, she thought, Mrs. Leroy seemed worried about Edna and Julian. . . . Was there something wrong, there? Not

as far as Julian was concerned, certainly. He was honesty and loyalty itself, and he loved Edna dearly. He was always alert to defend her, or explain away the little rudenesses and carelessnesses which she sowed about her. Julian himself, gay and careless as he seemed, never said anything that hurt or annoyed anyone. He never appeared to be trying not to, either. He merely liked to feel that the people he was with were pleased by his presence. But something was wrong with Edna. To begin with, Delight knew she did not like *her*. But that did not account for everything. Edna was annoyed about something else. She would romp through a day, having a good time with a sort of feverishness that scarcely let her stop for breath; and then she would seem to remember with bitterness whatever it was that worried her, and be cross about it. Delight couldn't think that such an attitude was normal for a girl with perfect health and an absolutely carefree life.

"Here she is! I dug her up!" Julian proclaimed, pulling Edna along in his arm out on to the porch. Edna, picturesque as usual in her bright clothes, was also sulking, as usual. She hadn't liked being dug up, that was plain. Or perhaps she didn't like going to dinner at the Stevensons'.

They were collected and shepherded into the limousine, after some trouble on Gloria's part caused by the fact that at the last minute Bill chose to stand in the middle of the lawn in that full sunlight which is so trying to evening dress, and recite "I Am Dying Egypt, Dying; Ebbs the Crimson Lifeblood Fast." He explained with doubtful truth that he had chosen this particular moment because he knew nobody would assault him, as it would mean that the whole party would have to wait while he put on a clean collar. What did happen was that the resourceful Gloria went into the house and got two large table-napkins, with which she and Julian stole up behind the elocutionist and simultaneously pinioned his arms and gagged him.

"You are overpowered by force of numbers. Better go quietly," Gloria warned him, cutting his thrilling recitation short at a particularly melodramatic part, and bringing up Derry by a gesture, to hold him from another angle, which carefully avoided mussing anything. So he moved dejectedly to the limousine, giving very much the effect of being led away to the dungeons of the Inquisition, and Horace the chauffeur, who looked as if he was invoking Cousin Augusta's shade to look down upon these terribly indecorous proceedings, motored them

across the ridiculously short distance to the Stevensons'.

The Stevensons' house was perfection. But there was a certain air of having to be careful not to break anything about both the house and its charming elderly owner which made it not quite as comfortable to the crowd of young people, who had been living under the aegis of an easy-going chaperon who was as young as any of them. Julian stealthily took out his ridiculous boutonnière, and even Bill, the irrepressible, entered with all the charm of manner he could assume, which was a good deal. There was a sophistication about the Stevensons, as if they were as simple and charming as they were because they had been everywhere and seen everything.

Mrs. Stevenson, slim and fragile and white-haired, stood to welcome them directly under a portrait of one of her sons—whether the living or the dead one Delight could not determine immediately. They had both been in the army, and as far as she could tell they had been nearly enough alike to be twins. But she heard Edna catch her breath, and turned to look at her. The girl's unusually bright cheeks had turned quite pale and her hands were locked tightly on each other.

"But you can't be in love with a *picture*," Delight reassured herself. "You might be sorry for it because it had to die and leave a lovely home and a pretty wife, but you couldn't really care for it. Especially when you had Julian." She looked at Julian, young and handsome and debonair, talking and laughing with his hostess, and thought how much more attractive he was in every way than either the portrait, or Everett Stevenson, who stood near him with Mrs. Leroy. The little hard finish which, justly or unjustly, she divined under Everett's sophisticated simplicities of manner, repelled her a little. Then she felt still more reassured, for Edna, instead of staring at the picture, had moved over to Julian with her little air of proprietorship, and was talking to him rapidly, flushed and excited.

Julian left her, however, almost immediately and made straight for Delight.

"She says you mustn't talk to your fiancée in public places. Says I'll have time enough for that in a long life together. She sent me off to be agreeable to Gloria. But I'd rather talk to you. We always seem to get along without much explanation, somehow, you and I, Delight. As if we'd thought along the same lines and—well, I don't know how to put it—saw things the same way and fitted in,

somehow. Queer, too, for I don't suppose two people could have been brought up more differently."

Delight smiled up at him, flushed with pleasure at what he said. So he felt that, too? She had always thought that it was just that he gave the fitting-in feeling to everybody.

"Maybe it's because we're second cousins," she ventured softly.

Julian laughed almost aloud.

"You little know the nature of second cousins, if *that's* the way you feel about it! No, it's just a delightful happen-so. Don't go and muss it up by offering stupid explanations of that sort." . . . Here he stopped for a moment to take the little envelope the butler handed him. "Now, how excellent! I was afraid Mrs. Stevenson would send you in with Everett. But thank goodness, she regards the chaperon as the head of the house—excellent etiquette—I admire it. . . . He'll have a nice long dinner with mother, and I wish nobody anything pleasanter. But I'm glad I have you!"

Delight was glad she had him, too. The day was ending very beautifully for her. At table she found herself with Everett on her other hand, which was also very pleasant. She did like Everett, only not as much as she did Julian. Julian always seemed

to carry happiness around in his pocket, so to speak, and to be able to take it out and give it to her. Everett was just a pleasant man, a little older and wiser, which made her quite comfortable sometimes.

The ultimate object of this dinner was a rehearsal of "The Land of Heart's Desire," and a final decision as to just when it should be given. Beside this play and the vaudeville, another short play was in rehearsal. As the theater neared completion, plans for its use grew more ambitious. Already the local Women's Club had cast a covetous eye on it for Greek plays, and had the promise of a chance to borrow it and give some Euripides in a great deal of white cheese-cloth. Most of "The Land of Heart's Desire" cast was in the family, so that whether or not the outsiders turned up after dinner they could get something done.

Stung by Julian's reminder that his theater was going to be done in two weeks, they got at the business of rehearsal promptly. Bill was in the cast as a sententious old priest, but Bill didn't think much of his part, which had fallen to him because somebody else had backed out. He didn't think much of any of the play, indeed.

*"'Oh, you are the great door-post of the house,
And I the red nasturtium, climbing up,'"*

he quoted Delight's part derisively. "I tell you, Stevenson, if any girl called me her little door-post by way of a pet name, we'd part then and there. I wouldn't wait for the goblins to get her."

"It would depend on how much you liked the girl," said Stevenson smilingly, while Gloria, who by virtue of her red hair and a capacity for dancing, was cast for the *Fairy Child*, the nearest to a goblin the play afforded, said she objected to being called names.

Everett Stevenson, who was the young peasant husband of the play, had a real talent for stage-direction. Mrs. Leroy had unselfishly taken over the part of the cross old mother, knowing, as she said, that most people didn't care for parts like that. Edna was not in it at all. Stevenson, who had assumed direction of things, had told her promptly that she hadn't any of the necessary atmosphere, following it up by some murmured explanation of what she had, instead, that seemed to soothe and cheer her immensely. He and Gloria had dug up an audacious little one-act play that a company of almost-professionals had made a great hit with the winter before, and Edna had one of the two best parts in that. She had to say and do things so *voyante* that they delighted her heart,

and made Julian look a little doubtful. Which, naturally, made Edna all the happier.

But it came about, because of her being in the second play, that she was unoccupied, while the first rehearsal went forward and the players in the second one filtering in. Naturally she was restless. Delight, who was always alert, probably because of her three years' training in watching Cousin Augusta's moods, noticed it. So, she thought, did Stevenson. But they were both hard at work. Julian, who had brought forth the plea that as it was his theater he ought to be let alone to look after it on its first night out, was also free. But he sat quietly with Mrs. Stevenson, watching the rehearsals go forward. Edna wanted to talk. And something was annoying her. Of late something always was, Delight thought, and stumbled in her speech.

"No!" said Stevenson sharply. "Never mind if Bill did spoil it. Say it again, very tenderly, as if you meant it, and lean forward and put your arms around my neck—not tightly—loosely. So."

He lifted her arms and arranged them, as he spoke, as they two sat on the couch that was doing duty for a rustic settle, together. Delight came to herself with a start, and said the words after him the best she could.

"That won't do," he told her. Then, in a lower ice, "Stop thinking about whether Edna Morse is bored or not bored. You old-fashioned little child, you don't have to be *that* good a hostess!"

She looked at him, surprised. He *was* horribly clever. She tried the speech over again, with not much better results.

"I see I'll have to settle that myself," he said, still for her ear alone. Then he raised his voice.

"Here, Julian! I can't tell a bit how this thing is going, from the middle of it. You'll have to come and read my part through once, while I watch from below."

Julian lifted his eyebrows, but he did as he was asked.

"Now from the beginning."

Delight felt the color rushing up over her face. Having Julian there by her made it much harder work to go through her part. It made her feel so much more the girl in the play, not quite happy in the distresses and wearinesses of this world, and yet loath to leave her lover and go to the Land of Heart's Desire. And to put her arms around Julian. . . .

She did it quite naturally and well, they told her, even to the very end. As she half lay, half fell,

with Julian's arms close around her again, and his mother's voice in her ears—

*“ ‘ Let go that lifeless form! You do but clasp
Some piece of ash-bole carved into her image—’ ”*

a hot flush went all over her. Julian's arms around her! Julian's arms that she wanted more than anything else on earth! Oh, what should she do—how could she go through the rest of the evening, knowing the thing she had learned in that minute! But she did. You can, if you have to. Stevenson's quiet, sophisticated voice, “That's better. We haven't time for any more of that tonight. Next play, now,” cut through her daze of discovery, and she took Julian's hand to help her up, though it burned through her. He, too, was a little flushed and excited. Perhaps he liked having his arms around her. Men did, almost any girl, she had been told. Things like that are talked about even in Mary Lebaron schools.

She went back and sank down in the farthest corner. As she did, Edna and Stevenson rose, to go on working with the second play. And she heard Edna say petulantly to Stevenson, yet with a passionate earnestness in her voice that Delight had never heard:

"It *isn't* true. I'm *not*. We were just awfully good friends, and we got tangled up in more of a flirtation than we meant to. Everybody thinks there's a lot more to it than there is. . . . Well, maybe there *was* then . . . there isn't any more. All right—don't believe me if you don't want to! I've been in a dreadfully hard situation—you might give me a chance to tell you about it. I'll *make* you believe it."

Delight was not sure of all of this. It was said very fast and passionately, and Stevenson, listening with his usual air of lover-like attention, nevertheless hurried Edna up to where the other play was beginning. It might have been part of her lines. . . .

"Gloria," she asked her friend point-blank that night, leaning in the doorway between their rooms, "do you think Edna is trying to make Everett Stevenson fall in love with her? And could she go as far as to pretend she wasn't engaged to do it? "

Gloria, flinging back the veil of red-gold hair that she had been combing over her face, nodded.

"She tries to make everybody fall in love with her, which is a sport there's a great deal to be said for and against. And when you're engaged in that

particular form of good hunting, you don't always keep truth on your side. It's tough on a pirate-queen like Edna to be labeled 'This seat taken' when there's no immediate prospect of matrimony. I shouldn't wonder if she and Julian had decided to call it just a friendship till they can name the day."

"But I saw them at the engagement-announcing dinner Cousin Augusta gave for them!" said Delight. "And you know Julian said . . ."

"I know he did. Well, engagements aren't like the laws of the Medes and the Persians. I've been engaged a couple of times myself. Do go to bed, Delight dear. Your eyes look like holes in a blanket."

Delight went to bed, her cheeks still burning with excitement. She didn't go to sleep for a long time. She could not help hoping that Gloria's theory was true. . . . Probably it wasn't. . . . But oh, how should she face Edna and Julian for the rest of the summer? And how could she ever have planned, as she had, to have them there? She must have . . .

"Oh, I've loved him! I've loved him all the time! And he belongs to somebody else—and even if he didn't, I am going to die! "

She cried stormily into her pillow till she was so tired she wept herself to sleep.

She hardly knew how she got through the intervening weeks. They rehearsed and danced and played golf and tennis at the Country Club, and had pleasant little informal affairs at their house and the other houses, and she went through it all with the rest. She had stopped being ashamed of herself after that one night of tears. She was glad—glad—*glad* that she had arranged things so that she was seeing all she could of Julian. She made herself enjoy the minutes with him and not think at all of the fact that after a while there wouldn't be any more. Because presently, after all, she would have gone to the Land of Heart's Desire, where there would be neither Julian nor Edna.

And so the night of the play came.

The seats in the half-circle outside the beautiful white theater were all filled. After the plays there would be time for a costume dance. If the weather was bad, there would have to be a postponement, of course, but it wasn't. . . . It was warm, and the moon they had counted on brought no bad weather in its wake.

Delight, leaning against the door of her little dressing-room in the laced bodice and rough skirt

of her peasant dress, followed Julian with her eyes, happily. He was so happy, and it was she who had been able to make him so. He was everywhere, testing the curtains, seeing that the effects he had arranged were all that his fondest dreams had hoped, gloating over the proportions, and, as Bill said, acting generally like the Angel Gabriel on the last day of Creation. Bill, saddened by his priest's costume very much as a dog is saddened by a holiday ribbon, sat humped up in the dressing-room, waiting disconsolately for the play to be over.

"You act like a small boy on recitation day in school," Gloria told him, and he responded that he felt like it, eyeing her with a mitigated gloom. She looked very unlike the matter-of-fact Gloria of everyday life, with her hair down and her feet bare, and the intervening parts clad in the *Fairy Child's* loose leaf-wreathed green drapery.

"What you want to do," she adjured him, "is to be a sport and not let Julian see how it fills you with sorrow to play a nice little part in his adored new theater. Anyway, it will be over in an hour. You can forget all about it."

"All you need to add is that well-known remark, 'Cheer up, the worst is yet to come,' to make me perfectly radiant with joy," growled Bill. "I

haven't been casting any glooms on Julian. 'Matter of fact, nobody could tonight, anyway. I say, Glory, you do look like a fairy queen. I've seen lots worse than you in the Follies."

What Gloria thought of this compliment was never known, because the play began then, and Bill and Delight had to go and be in it.

Delight realized afterwards that it was Everett Stevenson's steady, kind watchfulness that supported her through the play. While it was going on she was too excited to know much about anything but the necessity of driving ahead. Only at the last, as she fell, her soul called away by the *Fairy Child's* lure, mingling with the violins and the singing voices behind the scenes, came back the feeling of discovery, and the thrill, as she remembered the moment when Julian's arms, instead of Everett's, had closed around her, and she had found out why she had done everything that she had to keep Julian with her this last summer.

Stevenson's eyes looked down into hers with an expression very unlike their usual cool amusement. He, too, was alive and excited. Delight raised herself as the curtain fell, and fairly ran off the stage. She supposed she had shown what was in her mind too plainly. Perhaps Stevenson thought that she,

like Edna, was trying to make him care for her. His face had responded so, and his hold tightened a little as if unconsciously. . . .

"Oh, dear me! I'm playing with real people, as Gloria said," she thought distressedly, and her distress was not lightened by running across Gloria, crying against the wall in her gauzy green draperies, while Derry Mason, his arms folded, watched her tragically.

There was nothing to do but go down into the blessedly impersonal audience and watch the other play, and thank the angels that ran her affairs that she had nothing else to worry about tonight. Which goes to show that one should never thank one's angels prematurely.

CHAPTER X

DELIGHT caught up to Mrs. Leroy, who was a little ahead of her, humming to herself—

*“ ‘The wind blows out of the gates of the day,
The wind blows over the lonely of heart,’ ”*

under her breath. She turned and slipped her arm through Delight's.

“ Well, dear child, I'm glad to see you alive again. It's a comfort,” she said. “ You made a very convincing changeling. I'm glad the fairies didn't really get you. I prefer to have you at home with me.”

Delight looked up at the young face under Mrs. Leroy's gray hair. Here at least was one person that was unchanged—Cousin Maud.

“ I'd rather be at home with you,” she said.

“ We do fit in, don't we? ” said Mrs. Leroy. “ Delight, do you know I came very near adopting you when you were a baby? I only found it out lately. Your mother was left without much means of support after your father died, and Julian's father and I, hearing that she had a baby, wrote to offer to

take you. But Delight said she could look after you, and we lost sight of you both. I didn't know your name, only that there *was* a baby. She must have made arrangements for getting you into the Mary Lebaron, not long after, and died. Do you remember her? "

Delight shook her head.

"She died when I was two. I spent the rest of my life at the school till Cousin Augusta found me. But I wish you had."

"I do, too," said Mrs. Leroy warmly. "And Julian always wanted a little sister. I think we both feel as if it had almost happened, by now."

Delight felt her heart getting all warm and happy. . . . And why shouldn't she keep Cousin Maud with her after Julian and Edna were married, if she would stay? She had really found in her the lady who was very loving, of the old story.

They settled themselves among the variously costumed audience to see the next play with that blissful feeling of irresponsibility which only those who have finished their parts in an entertainment know.

The play Edna was in went off at least as well as the other, if not better. Edna, flushed with glory, took various curtain calls before the thing was finally at an end, and the whole party migrated to the house

for their dance—except such lovers as lingered by the way to flirt a little. Flirtation and excitement were in the air that night. Things were electric.

Delight found herself being taken possession of by Everett Stevenson for the first dances. There were no programs.

"Oh, here!" she protested. "I have this next dance with some strange man or other, and the one after that with Julian. We can't do this."

"Well, I have this next dance with some girl or other, but that's nothing. Let's both be outrageous. I'm a little tired of being a very well-bred person in a don't-care world. Aren't you?"

He didn't talk like the Everett Stevenson she knew at all. He looked a little different too, very much as if he didn't care.

She shook her head.

"I may want to be outrageous, but I'm hostess. Please take me back to Mrs. Leroy, over there in the corner."

He looked plaintive.

"But Edna's over there, and I've seen so much Edna lately. She is a little strenuous for an aged gentleman like myself."

Delight felt indignant. He had no right to be charming to Edna and then say such things about

her, and she promptly told him so. He promptly admitted that she was right. "But I've had provocation," he said under his breath. "Men are only human, too."

She did not at all know what to make of Everett in this mood. She wished the evening was over.

But she won. She led him up to Mrs. Leroy, by whom Edna was standing, vivid in the daring green and gold evening frock of her part, but lowering. Julian stood beside her. He was conspicuous, for he was the only man in the room not in costume.

"You had this dance with me, Everett Stevenson," said Edna with her usual directness. "What did you mean by walking off and not coming back till it was over?"

"I thought, naturally, that you would prefer a few moments to congratulate your fiancé in, seeing that he'd just come into the room," said Everett easily, with his usual pleasant smile. "I thought I was being uncommonly tactful! I can only throw myself on your mercy."

Edna's face changed from a clouded sullenness to a lightning-like anger.

"That's no excuse at all," said Edna clearly. "I've told you a dozen times that Julian and I are not engaged any more. We played at it for a while,

that was all. Now do you believe me, when I'm telling you before Julian? "

It was impossible, outrageous—horrible. It was the sort of thing that Delight had never imagined anybody could do or say. But Edna was saying it, evidently in desperate earnest, and her voice had so carried that twenty people near them had heard and were stiffening to the drama of it. Delight cast a terrified look at Julian. He was ghastly white, but as he caught her eye he seemed to gain courage.

" Help me carry it through as one of Edna's silly jokes," he whispered to her, as instinctively she ranged herself at his side to help. " If we don't pull it through some way Mother'll go to pieces here in public."

" Anything you say," she said, glancing at Mrs. Leroy, whose heart was beating visibly beneath the little red shawl tied across her breast.

" Certainly we're not engaged," he said with a natural note of gaiety in his voice, though he was still white. " Not for tonight, anyway. Delight and I are going to be engaged instead. Good-by, forever, Edna."

Still smiling, he caught her hand lightly, made a deep mock-tragic bow, kissed her finger-tips and put them into the hand of Stevenson,—who looked

as though he didn't care for the gift—smiled reassuringly at his mother, and caught Delight off into the dance. As they went, Delight too nodded smilingly over her shoulder to Mrs. Leroy, whose face relaxed, as she leaned back in her chair. She saw that Stevenson, too, had put the only possible end to the scene by sweeping Edna off.

The two couples crossed as they circled in the dance. Delight and Julian did not attempt to talk. Edna, Delight saw, was talking to Stevenson steadily and vehemently. And all over the room a little stir was growing, as if the news of the scene had traveled. Delight, acutely conscious of Julian's arm around her, and as acutely conscious, through sympathy, of what he was undergoing, felt her excitement mounting. His words, spoken in desperation or bravado, said and resaid themselves in her ears—"Delight and I are going to be engaged instead. . . ."

If one could only have that for a little while—have Julian for just this miraculous year-after-next that was now! . . .

It would all be so easy—Cousin Maud loved her. Julian and she—as he had said—"fitted in." . . . "Delight and I . . ." Oh, if the words would only stop going around in her mind!

"Stop just a moment for breath, Julian," she begged him. Julian stopped, and drew her into a corner, glancing behind him as he did so—in a moment she saw why. Edna, just a few couples behind them, had stopped too, Stevenson necessarily halting with her. Delight thought she was going to speak to Julian, perhaps try to make it up with him. Instead, it was to Delight herself she spoke, smiling the while as if what she said was the merest courtesy.

"It's all your fault, from beginning to end," she said. "You schemed and planned to get that old woman's money away from Julian. Everybody knew that he was to have it. He always acted as if he didn't . . . but everybody else knew. Ask his mother. You've smashed things up for us, and then pretend to make them up by offering Julian a measly little bit of money for building a theater in your back-yard! We'd be married by now if you hadn't done it. . . . And when you look shocked at me for ending things once and for all instead of letting them drag along. You . . ."

"Stop that, Edna," said Julian, as sharply as though he had been married to her a year.

He caught Delight almost roughly and pulled her along in the dance. Edna was left standing

there, looking like an angry child. Stevenson, looking disgusted, had moved a little way from her.

"Julian, is what she said true?" Delight demanded.

"Perfect nonsense. Aunt Augusta may have talked to Edna about it—she never did to me. I told you before, she always said she was going to leave it to public schools in some outlandish place. There's no telling where on earth an old woman may leave her money. She coaxed Edna into announcing the engagement, that's all I know. If she did it by that sort of a promise, she behaved abominably. Put it out of your mind."

Delight was silent. What he had said was proof enough to her. So this was what she had done to Julian—Julian, whose happiness she wanted more than anything on earth. She had been innocent, but that didn't make any difference. . . . Well, it might come back to him. . . .

"Delight and I are going to be engaged instead." The words echoed in her head as they had before. She looked up into his face, set and hurt as she had never seen it. . . . It didn't matter what he thought of her if she could straighten it out. And she wanted him, she wanted him so! And she was only going to be alive such a little while! . . . But

he would hate her. . . . But if he went away from her she would be more miserable than if he was with her . . . or would she be? And perhaps if he had all the money Edna would be happy and marry him, and they would forget all about her. She didn't mind being forgotten, once she was dead and in heaven, where she would be having those good times which seemed so very dim beside the happiness of a few months of Julian. . . . But it would be wrong. . . . "Delight and I are going to be engaged instead. . . ." It would be very pleasant just to pretend it was so for one night. That couldn't commit anybody to anything. . . . If only the dance would never stop! But it ended, and they came back, as they were bound to, to Mrs. Leroy. They found her surrounded by a great many more people than she had been, and she still looked flushed and upset. She was evidently being asked questions. As Delight and Julian neared her, old Mrs. Gregory, the noisiest and most feared dowager of the summer colony, pounced on them.

"What's all this? Change partners, eh?" she asked. "Confess now, you children!" She spoke with what was meant for archness, but was mostly peremptoriness.

Delight looked over at her cousin's disturbed face. Then she looked up at Julian. She deliberately laid her hand on his, and spoke in a voice as clear and carrying as Edna's, though it was steadier and more quiet:

"It's quite true. It's Julian and I who are engaged. And we intend to be married very soon."

Then she let the torrent of surprised congratulations break. She did not dare to look at Julian. She only saw the look of thankfulness on his mother's face.

It seemed impossible to Delight that the evening should ever come to an end. When it finally had, there was left her a memory as mixed and vivid as a kaleidoscope. Everett Stevenson's eyes fixed upon her in surprise and pain, Mrs. Leroy's look of rest and relaxation, the look of triumph in Gloria's face as she danced every dance with Bill, the many colors and shapes of the masquerade costumes, the feel of Julian's hand, very cold and tight-gripping as it clenched over hers after her announcement, all mixed themselves with the sound of the violins that said:

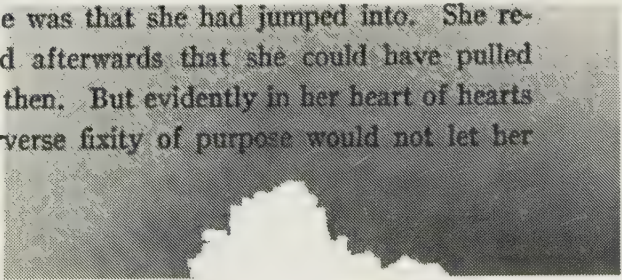
*"The wind blows out of the gates of the day,
The wind blows over the lonely of heart. . . ."*

and said it over and over. There was a reckoning coming with several people, she knew that. And she did not know what she was going to do, how much she had courage for. She nearly rose once, and went into Gloria's room to tell her all about it, and got as far as the doorway. Then she remembered that Gloria had troubles, too, and went back again. The end of it was that she came down to breakfast as white as a ghost, too miserable to add the shading of pink color that Gloria had always insisted upon.

The only other persons down there were Derry Mason and Mrs. Leroy. Derry looked as unhappy as she felt; Mrs. Leroy, on the other hand, looked happier than Delight had ever remembered seeing her. She reached her arm up as Delight passed her, and pulled her down to kiss her.

"My dear little daughter!" she said in a whisper. "But it wasn't quite kind, dear, for you both to keep me in the dark. It's the first thing that Julian ever did without telling me about it."

Every word she said made Delight see how deep the tangle was that she had jumped into. She remembered afterwards that she could have pulled out even then. But evidently in her heart of hearts some perverse fixity of purpose would not let her pull out.



"Please forgive us; it didn't depend on us entirely. I promise you it will be the last thing he ever keeps from you as far as I can make it," she heard herself saying. All the while she was horribly shocked with one part of her mind.

Julian had let the thing go through, the night before. His one idea had been to save his mother, Delight knew. She had made it very difficult for him to contradict it. Every moment that Delight herself kept to it made it still more difficult. She remembered idly—her mind flying to details as minds do in crisis—that the Leroy's were not well off, and had sublet their little city apartment till the first of October. She supposed things would be too uncomfortable all around to go on with the present household, after Julian told the truth about things. It would be easier for Gloria and herself to go away and leave the Leroy's in possession; they could travel, or board somewhere—Delight knew that she would never have the courage to buy or rent another house. She might even go back to the big gloomy mansion in the city, full of memories of typewriting for Cousin Augusta. Though she didn't want to do that.

It takes a very short time to think things. All these desperate thoughts had hurried through De-

light's mind in the space of time outwardly occupied by one small dish of oatmeal and cream. Even that she gobbled a little. She wanted to get her breakfast out of the way before either Edna or Julian appeared. This was not as hard as it sounds. Julian was usually the latest at their elastic-houred breakfast, and Edna had trays sent up at the slightest excuse. Delight ate really more breakfast than she wanted or needed. The net result of her struggle between hurrying through to get it out of the way of embarrassing people, and dallying so that Mrs. Leroy would suspect nothing unusual, was that she met Julian coming into the dining-room, looking rather white and tired, as she hastened out. She murmured a confused good-morning, and would have gone on, but he reached out a swift hand and detained her.

"I want to see you alone, as soon as breakfast is over," he said in his ordinary voice. "Wait for me on the porch."

The words sounded natural enough in his mother's ears, though Delight started when he spoke to her.

"Very well," she said. Her throat so contracted with nervousness that her words were almost inaudible. She could not help hoping that Gloria or some other opportune person would stray by them

in time to prevent the conversation she was in for. At the same time she was perfectly conscious that she would do well to get it over.

She went out and sat down in the nearest porch rocker as if it were a dentist's chair.

It seemed forever before Julian came out. In spite of his troubles, like the prisoners in the newspapers, he had evidently "made a good breakfast."

Delight turned on him such a frightened look that, stern as he seemed, his face softened.

"I'm not going to worry you," he said.

"But we have to talk this thing out," Delight nodded.

"Come to some place where we won't be interrupted," he said, taking her arm.

"The summer-house in the garden where Derry paints?" she suggested.

"No, he might want to. I'll tell you where—the theater. Sure to be nobody there now."

She followed him off the porch and across the garden and the courts. They were both silent. Before they reached the theater Julian halted.

"We'll sit here," he said, pointing to a grassy spot in the shade of a tree. "We're not likely to run into anybody."

It did not seem at all likely to Delight sta-

tionary as they were. She said nothing, only dropped mutely beside Julian on the grass. What she expected, she did not know—a rage, perhaps. But Julian only looked at her in what seemed to be distress.

“I feel as if the world was turned upside down,” he said. “I—Delight, it’s horrible! I thought Edna loved me—to be sure she’s been saying little fool things about not being so awfully much engaged to me, and she’s kept her ring out of sight. But Edna always did have funny little whims. It was part of her being so cute. She would always turn you down for a dance or anything like that so you’d be crazier over her than ever. But this—this was earnest. She said it before everybody.”

Delight had expected various things, but not this—that Julian should pour out to her his feelings about Edna, when he had so much against herself. Then she reminded herself how Julian had come to regard her as a friend and confidante, and how easy it is for men to forget every point of view but their own, especially in tangled love-affairs. And if ever a love-affair was tangled this was. So she merely sat still and waited for him to go on. He did.

“I feel as if everything in the world were upside

down. Edna's so up-and-coming, and the pluckiest thing—you ought to see her on a skittish horse! I always thought she was the sort of a girl to go through hell and high water for anybody she cared about."

Delight was naturally a truthful girl, and had never confounded loyalty with physical courage. So she still said nothing, and Julian drove on.

"I almost feel as if Mother might turn on me, next. And you, Delight—whatever on earth made you do such a fool thing? We're going to have all the trouble in the world to get out of it."

Delight stared at him.

"I don't want to get out of it," she said unwaveringly.

She saw now why he had talked to her so naturally about his troubles with Edna. He had not yet realized that Delight had done anything but carry off a situation with injudicious thoroughness—with such thoroughness, in fact, that it would be hard to bring back again to the place it had been carried from.

Julian looked at her in stunned silence. There was a long pause. Finally: "You mean you're holding me to it?" he demanded.

Delight nodded. She could not speak.

A harder man might have felt that there was no question of being held to it. He might have crashed through the consequences and let Delight do what she might, and his mother take it as she pleased. But Julian had been brought up in an old-fashioned code of courtesy and chivalry. He was too honorable himself to be in the least prepared for Edna's dishonesty with him; and the idea of being thought to jilt Delight, and of having his mother go through the excitement and trouble that might be the end of all this, had weight with him. Also his world, which had been a good part the ideal Edna he had built up for himself around an Edna not in the least resembling her, had gone smash. He looked at Delight in a way she could scarcely bear, as if she were a strange person.

"I don't seem to know much about girls," he said.

"*Nobody* does," said Delight at random, with a little hysterical catch in her voice. "Not even the girls."

"You mean it?" he asked again, with a stern note in his voice. "Why?"

"It's like being on a deathbed, nearly," Delight reminded herself. "There won't be any me next year to be ashamed." She lifted her head and looked at him fully and told him the truth.

"I'm in love with you, Julian. That's one reason why I want you to marry me. But there are other reasons that I'd rather wait a little to tell you. Being in love with you is the principal one."

She knew that if she told him of her desire to leave him Cousin Augusta's money in such a way that none of the rest of the family could dispute his right to it, he would refuse to marry her, no matter what broke. And if she told him that she had not long to live, the other explanation would go with it as a matter of course.

"You—you know," said Julian, stammering a little, for it seemed a brutal thing to say to any girl, who had just made Delight's confession, "that I don't love you?"

Delight bowed her head.

"And you know I do love Edna, and that I'm all broken up about the way she's acted—and yet you want me to go—to go through with it?"

"Yes," said Delight, almost inaudibly.

"All right," said Julian, rising, with a white face. "If you want to marry me, knowing that I'm so miserable I don't care a damn what becomes of me, all right. Only for the Lord's sake let's get it over in a hurry."

"Then—then I can tell you the other reasons,"

Delight managed to say. She had not had one of her faint spells in a long time now—but the excitement and strain of last night and today were too much for her. She had been fighting off her dizzy feeling for the last ten minutes. Her head dropped against the tree, and her eyes closed. Her last conscious thought was a hope that Julian wouldn't think she was doing it for effect.

As it turned out it was a very useful faint, because it served to make Bill and Gloria, who came strolling along about this time, think Julian's whiteness and muteness natural. Gloria took charge of Delight matter-of-factly, with the remark that she'd been expecting something like this; which made the men feel less upset. Delight came to very shortly, as she always did from these faints. Indeed they were less faints than vertigo. Gloria carried her off to her room as soon as she could go there, and sat uncompromisingly down on the foot of the day-bed where she had established Delight.

"So it's true," she began. "I didn't more than half believe it was, last night. But it certainly gives me that impression today. Bill and I are in raptures. Many congrats, Delight, not to speak of three rousing cheers! I hope Julian knows what a good exchange he's made! "

"Where's Edna?" Delight asked with seeming irrelevance.

"I don't think she's up yet. If she is I haven't seen her. Poor kid, I pity her when she fully grasps all! I had it figured out last night that she thought she could have a better time with Stevenson if he thought she was foot-loose; and that she planned to explain to Julian that it was just her little playful way, afterwards. Now she can't!"

"But you make her out actually scheming!" said Delight.

"So I do," said Gloria. "But tell me now, Delight. Have I jumped to conclusions? Or are you going to marry Julian?"

"Yes," said Delight simply. She didn't feel that she had strength to say any more. And not even to Gloria did she want to go into details about it. She did not regret what she had done. But she wanted to think about it as little as possible. She felt as if she were jumping over a precipice that might turn out to be a precipice or, on the other hand, just a nice little shelving ledge of rock with green meadows on the other side. When the jump was over—there would be time enough to think.

"It may cheer you—or it may not," Gloria interrupted her thoughts, "to know that you'll probably

see more or less of me for the rest of your life, if nobody changes their plans. Bill and I have pretty much decided to be one another's. Of course, everything's very much in the future," she added hastily, "but that's the way we feel about it—now."

"I intend to see more or less of you for the rest of my life, anyhow," Delight said lightly.

Gloria frowned.

"I don't believe a word of it," answering what Delight implied, not what she said. "You're going to live to be an old lady, and have all sorts of good times with Julian and old Mrs. Denegar's money. Delight, I shall die of just plain curiosity if you don't tell me something about it. How and when and where . . ."

Delight still lying back on the cushions of the day-bed, shook her head.

"I can't tell you. Julian may, if he wants to, next year. And—and, Gloria, if I don't die after planning everything with a view to it, I'll—I'll—*die!*"

It was something of an anticlimax and both the girls smiled.

"What *do* you mean?" demanded Gloria. "Did you tell Julian?"

"No," Delight answered.

"Sensible girl! To the best of my belief you'd only be making him unhappy for nothing. That doctor was an idiot—all you needed to make you get well was what you're having, a good time and an adorable boy like Julian to make violent love to you."

Delight shivered a little. If it gave Gloria any pleasure to feel that way about it, it was just as well.

"But what about you?" she asked. "Why were you crying last night with Derry Mason?"

"Was that you that whisked by?" asked Gloria. "I was so busy with my grief that I couldn't see who it was. Why . . . I always cry when I refuse men. It seems such a mean thing to do to a nice man who's in love with you. And I hadn't the faintest idea of it, Delight—on my honor I hadn't. Usually when a girl says that, it's fishing—but I *didn't*. I had my suspicions of Bill, but I hadn't any idea Derry Mason had any feelings for anybody. I thought you might practise on him a bit, and that if he'd fall for anybody he would for you. You're much more what he always said he wanted. And instead you walk off with Everett Stevenson and Julian Leroy—and Stevenson is the

most sophisticated man I know, and Julian the gayest."

"And I am neither sophisticated nor gay," said Delight with a little sigh.

"No, you're not," said frank Gloria. "You're just as attractive in your own way, though, evidently—look at the results!"

"But I think you're wrong about Everett Stevenson. He has a sort of manner as if he were half in love with any girl he talks to."

"I grant you that!" admitted Gloria, "but that manner isn't a protective armor, as you seem to think it, as regards a man's ever falling in love on his own account. That kind does it just like the poor little other kind that blushes when it sees a girl, or the idiots that always say anxiously to themselves when they go to bed every night, "Have I been honest with the young ladies I have met today as regards my intention not to marry them, or have I *not*?"

CHAPTER XI

GLORIA was enjoying her own conversation so much that she forgot completely the argument she started with. She patted a stray curl of her vivid hair into place, leaning toward the mirror to do it, bent down and kissed Delight suddenly, and went out.

"There's something that needs fixing about this affair," she muttered. "I was always an intelligent young person. Let me see what I can do."

In pursuance of her plan, she waylaid Julian. He was down in the gymnasium, though it was a perfect day, practising shots by himself at the pool-table. He looked tired and worried.

"You look to me like a young man who didn't know what was going to happen next," said Gloria briskly. "Are you?"

Julian, however weary or puzzled he might be inwardly, was not an easy person to draw. He smiled at her pleasantly.

"How about a little game?" he invited her with

much geniality. "No? Why, yes, I am exactly that kind of a young man. There isn't any other kind as far as I know."

"He's clever as well as good-looking," Gloria mused aloud.

"You didn't desert old Bill, with his beautiful golden hair and his loving ways, to tell me *that*," said Julian. "Not unless you're much more of a vamp than I hope, for his sake."

"So you've exchanged news," said Gloria composedly.

"Haven't you and Delight?" he demanded.

She nodded.

"And where do you stand with Edna?" she asked coolly. She had picked up a couple of the pool balls and stood balancing them idly. He turned a little from her.

"Edna's not engaged to me, and Delight is. I should think last night's little dance had informed you of *that*."

"Yes, you both told the world, all right," she admitted. "But now—wouldn't you like me to break the news to Edna that your affair with Delight was real, and not a bluff?"

He looked at her very narrowly.

"All I know on earth is what you've said just

now, and what Delight told me upstairs, which wasn't any more full of details," she hastened to inform him. "But I'll be honest with you. My own private belief is that you've seen what Edna really was for some little time, and that you and Delight have cared a lot more for each other than you realized, from the minute you met; and that when Edna canned you in that picturesque and tasteful manner, you saw your chance and took it. Till Delight came back with you and accepted that old lady's congratulations in that earnest-minded manner, I admit I took the whole thing as a joke. Well, Julian, I have lived with Delight for three months now, practically in her pocket, and I can tell you that she's the most adorable person to live with that you could find in a year. One thing. She isn't as well as she looks. You want to marry her in a hurry, and pet her a lot. She's had a horrid life till your old aunt died."

"I'm going to marry her as soon as possible and be as good to her as I can. But I'll deal with Edna, myself, thank you, Glory. You're a good kid. If you don't want to play pool let's beat it, shall we? "

Gloria said no more, except under her breath, to herself.

"Rather you than I, my boy, when it comes to tackling Edna."

And they went upstairs amicably, to find that Edna had come down, telephoned violently, and gone out, as usual, taking the little car. So Gloria breathed a deep sigh as of duty well done, and quite openly went to hunt up her Bill.

Young love is selfish. The only person who really felt badly to think that Derry Mason was suddenly called back to the city was Mrs. Leroy, whose especial pet he had been. Delight, half aghast at herself, half happy in spite of herself, bade him good-by with her usual shy friendly courtesy, scarcely knowing, or caring underneath, that he was going away. She realized this too late, and nearly wrote him a letter telling him that she was sorry she hadn't been sorrier; then, recollecting that it would make matters worse, desisted with regrets. It is possible that Derry, having his own preoccupations, didn't notice much anyway. Even colorless and quiet people, who never say or do much that can be related, have feelings.

Edna came back with a deeper stain of color than usual on each cheek. She spoke airily to Julian, who was on the porch at that time, talking to his

mother; said impersonally, "I'd like the side porch to myself this afternoon, if nobody minds—callers . . ." and went back into the house.

"I *wish* you'd tell me more about it, Julian," said his mother, more resignedly than reproachfully, "especially as apparently Edna doesn't intend to say anything to anybody. It's rather a difficult situation for Delight, as the child is really Edna's hostess."

"I don't see that there's anything to say or do," Julian answered with a note of patience in his voice. "Edna doesn't want me, Delight does. Nobody's feelings are hurt."

"If you ask me, which you aren't, I think it's fantastic," said his mother. "In my day, some ages gone by, if I'd changed partners in this casual way, it would have been considered only polite for the house-party to break up."

"With all the proper signs of grief and sympathy," added Julian. "Well, there's still hope, Motherdy."

He had one eye on the door where Edna had gone in, and was meditating a dash after her. He did not in the least relish the idea of a scene with her, but he was dreadfully afraid that she might do or say something wild before his mother if he

did not get hold of her first. Accordingly at the first chance he bolted after his late fiancée.

She was hastening upstairs, in search, presumably, of another frock to put on. He ran up after her, and held her with a determined hand on her arm.

"Well," said Edna.

"Haven't you anything to say to me?" he demanded.

"Well, what have you to say to me?" she countered, with the dauntless, impish little smile she kept for men alone. She did not, from her manner, seem to take any of it seriously. Delight, on the next floor, was on her way down when she heard them. She halted, and slid into the nearest bedroom to be out of their sight—too late realizing that she was not out of hearing, for Edna came on up the stairs, Julian following.

"I want to know what you intend to do about this thing," he said. "You threw me down last night and Delight took me on. That's all anybody needs to know, isn't it? I don't care a hang for myself, but I want things easy for Mother. You know what the doctors say—she may live forty years, or any sudden shock may finish her."

"Oh, I won't furnish the shock," said Edna carelessly. "But I don't see that I threw you down

particularly. We may resume in the fall. I simply took the only method that seemed likely to penetrate the world and you to explain that we *weren't* formally engaged. People never are till they know the date of marriage."

"You act as though the whole thing was a child's game," Delight heard Julian say, his voice hard with anger. "Did anybody ever tell you there was such a thing as honor? "

"You don't have to have it when you're pretty," said Edna with a little note of flippant laughter in her voice. "Don't you think I'm pretty, Julian dear? "

They were opposite the badly selected hiding-place that Delight had chosen, and came into her view again. Edna had stopped full in front of Julian. She had her hands behind her back, and her little vividly colored face, with its big black eyes and mocking mouth, was tilted up to Julian's angry one.

"Nobody ever denied it. But your ways aren't. And I took you seriously enough to—it's settled that I'm going to marry Delight Lanier."

The allurements and the color vanished together for a moment from Edna's face. Then she forced back a smile.

"You're not, dear. You just think so. . . . You perfect goose, to take that game of puss-in-the-corner last night seriously! Wake up! It isn't! "

"My mother believes it serious. So does everybody else in the house, including Delight. There's something called honor, Edna."

"So you said. You needn't say it again. . . . Here's something else to remember me by."

She ended the amazing scene by deliberately standing on tiptoe, putting her hands on Julian's shoulders and kissing him. Then she laughed and ran down the hall.

"My Lord! " said Julian desperately. "What am I to do! "

"I wonder what *I* ought to do? " echoed Delight mentally.

Whatever it was she did not do it.

"Soon—he can go back to her soon! " she said aloud mechanically. So she did nothing; nothing more, that is, than to stay where she was until they were both safely out of sight, and to feel very much like an eavesdropper. As she finally emerged from her shelter—which was Mrs. Leroy's bedroom, as it happened—it occurred to her that Gloria's idea had a good deal in it. Edna didn't want to be

tied to one man by an announced engagement, but neither did she want to let Julian go. And this seemed to Delight very far from playing the game.

"She can't really care for Julian if being engaged to him wasn't enough for her," she argued, not untruly.

She—or Gloria—was proved right, as she thought, by the fact that the visitor Edna had kept the side porch clear for proved to be Everett Stevenson. Luncheon had been rather a hectic affair. Edna laughed and talked more than usual, with the deep excited flush still on her cheeks. Bill and Gloria, who had their own reasons for being excited and pleased, helped her out. Mrs. Leroy, a little bewildered still, was her natural self. But Delight and Julian were very quiet. Mrs. Leroy did not refer to the situation. She probably thought it would be a little difficult to do, before Edna.

Stevenson came over about four. Edna was on the lookout for him; ran to the gate, gaily took possession of him with a little flourish, and led him to the ostentatiously reserved spot on the side porch.

What she said to him or what he said to her was never officially known. Dora, carrying tea out there—a tea carefully dictated beforehand by Edna—was obviously much pleased by such snatches of

it as she gathered, and hinted darkly that it would be Delight's advantage to know all, when she came in to tuck in her young mistress for the night. Dora had grown very tender of Delight of late. But Delight did not wish to know all. She knew quite enough as it was. It seemed to her, lying awake and astonished that night, as if there would never be an end to scenes and emotions.

She remembered what Gloria had said once, and was half inclined to believe it. On the first afternoon, when they were getting the tennis-court ready, her friend had said, insisting that she didn't believe it personally, but giving it a certain amount of faith apparently, that if you wanted a thing to happen you could sometimes draw it down on yourself by picturing it and wanting it hard enough. All the years in the Mary Lebaron and the three with Cousin Augusta she had wanted this summer of pleasures and palaces—of young people and good times—of—lovers. And when things had been so ordered that she could buy for herself, or get one way or another by means of Cousin Augusta's money, the pleasures and palaces, she had nearly forgotten the lovers. At any rate she hadn't expected them particularly. There had been so many other unaccustomed delights that one couldn't think

of everything at once. She had wanted the pleasure of Julian's presence, and had obtained it; she was going on to marry Julian, for a little while that remained to her; but one certainly could not call Julian a lover.

That afternoon when Everett Stevenson had finished his session with Edna and the carefully chosen afternoon tea and the carefully preserved solitude, he had sauntered straight out, in apparently that aimless way of his that yet seemed to always get him where he wished to be taken, and discovered Delight hiding in what she had believed a most exceptional hiding-place. She looked up at him startled, as he drew near.

"Why—why, I thought you were with Edna!" was all she found to say in the surprise of the moment.

"I was with Edna," his kind leisurely voice answered her. "Now I am with you. Edna and I finished our talk."

He sat down, always leisurely, and looked at Delight in a considering sort of way. Delight always felt absolutely at ease with Everett. His being so perfectly at ease himself—the atmosphere of perfect gentleness and certainty with which he was always surrounded—gave her a feeling of poise

and comfortableness and of being very admirable, which was always agreeable. She leaned back now, after her first start of surprise, and smiled up at him in her sunniest and most friendly fashion. He seemed like a nice oasis of peace and friendliness in all these uncharted seas of action and emotion.

"I'm glad you've come to talk to me," she said. "I think I needed somebody nice and friendly like you. Do you know, that's one of the greatest comforts about you—one always knows that you are going to be kind and nice, too."

He smiled.

"I belong to an older generation. I'm thirty-two, Delight, and when what professors call my formative period was going on, we were trained—those of us who were trained to manners—to get on socially with the least possible friction. You young things of these days are more like fireworks. I suppose growing up during a war when getting on with the least possible friction was at a discount may account for you."

"But I'm not like fireworks," said Delight wistfully. She so often wished she were.

"But I don't like fireworks," said Everett Stevenson with finality. "I didn't mean you especially. Just the same, my dear child, I would venture to

state that you are not wholly without your contemporaries' capacity for going ahead and helping yourself to life. That came in with the war, as I said."

Delight colored up to the soft loose curls on her forehead. He sounded as if he knew things that she hoped nobody but Julian would ever know. Then she reassured herself swiftly. Whoever else would or wouldn't, this man would never say anything to hurt you. Yet she would make sure.

"Do you think I've helped myself, especially?" she faltered.

He shook his head. The late afternoon sunlight filtering on her violet organdy and through the golden-brown of her curls, fell, too, on his fine, clear-cut head and tall, lounging figure. He looked very like the photograph of the bridegroom today. Delight had almost forgotten it. She wondered if he, too, were going to marry a little light thing, as his brother had done, flyaway, arrogant, greedy little Edna. She looked at him more closely than she knew.

"You look as though you were sorry for me," he said, instead of answering her directly. "I don't think you need be. . . . Why, no—I meant nothing in particular. I think you showed a lot

of intelligence and initiative in making such a pleasant life for yourself this summer. Delightful people those cousins of yours. . . . Delightful . . . that's the right word for everything about this place. It's full of you, Delight."

There was more of a caress than usual in his caressing voice, and Delight felt herself coloring under it.

"It always seems to me more full of the happiness your brother and his wife must have had here," said she. "There's a wonderful feeling about the place."

"Edna told me about the chest of Kittie's memory-things that you found, that she wanted you to use or give her—and that you put them back where the child hid them," he said. "When I heard that, I knew more surely than ever that you belonged to this place more than anyone else could. I love this place, Delight. Will you let me come back to it to live?"

His voice had not changed. It was just as even and gentle and caressing as it had been, and no more. He looked at her with the usual friendly steady look. But—what on earth could he mean?

"Let you come back and live?" she faltered.

"Do you mean you want to come and stay with us this summer?"

He shook his head.

"I mean that I want to come and stay with you always. I love you, little Delight. I want you to marry me. Hadn't you thought I cared for you at all?"

Delight stared at him, frightened and breathless.

"No!" she half whispered. "How—how could I?"

"Very easily, if you were not the simple-minded child you are," he said, his voice still a caress. "Well, you know it now, Delight."

He said nothing more. He sat exactly where he had been, looking into her eyes and waiting for her to answer. But she could not think of any answer to give. It seemed so doubly impossible. Finally—

"But—but didn't Edna tell you anything this afternoon?" she remembered to ask him.

"It seems to me that Edna told me a great many things. At least, she talked steadily for an hour. If you mean, did she speak of last night's affairs, she said that it was all of it a comedy; that she took a typically spectacular way of making it clear that she wasn't going to marry Julian, and that you and he came back at her rather rashly—for I don't

believe any of you foolish children realized how seriously your performance was taken. That's one reason why I am speaking to you about marrying me this afternoon, a little more quickly than I intended to, dear. It will be your easiest way of straightening the thing out. And that foolish little firefly of an Edna can go back to her Julian with no lives lost."

That was all Delight ever learned of Edna's desperate venture. It was all, she could be sure, that Stevenson would ever tell anybody. He *was* so safe.

"Take your time, dear child," he added gently. He leaned toward her and took one of her hands, but aside from that his position and expression did not change. It wasn't that he didn't care—Delight knew enough of him to know that. It was just because he was the sort of a person he was—supremely courteous, supremely self-controlled.

She took him at his word, and remained silent. It was a thing to think of. This man really cared for her. People who did that had been almost nonexistent in Delight's life so far. He was everything that she could want theoretically. He would give her all the consideration, all the care and love that any girl could ask of her lover. She could go on living in this village that she had come to love,

or, guided by all the sophistication and experience that she knew was under his simplicity, be shown more of life, while life remained to her, than in any other way possible.

Against that was her marriage to a man who did not love her, who had no money, who told her frankly that he was only marrying her because he did not care what became of him. There was sure to be unhappiness in a marriage like that for a girl who felt things as Delight felt them. She knew that positively enough. She knew, too, what the advice of any sane person would be who knew the circumstances. If Gloria ever knew about it she would tell her, with her usual downrightness, that she was an absolute idiot. . . . Perhaps she was. And yet . . .

She looked up at Everett Stevenson.

"I would be very much wiser to marry you," she said. "But that was earnest about my marrying Julian."

"But, child, you don't have to—he'd never hold you to it . . ." he checked himself. She did wish she knew how far Edna had gone in her statements.

"I'm going to marry Julian because I love him," she said. "Because the room turns into a different

place when he is in it. I've loved him ever since we met. I—I wish I didn't. I wish I loved you, because it would be much better to marry you from every point of view. I know that. Better for you and me and Julian, I suppose. But what can I do? ”

“ You wouldn't give me time to see if I could make you care for me instead? ” he asked very softly, very pleadingly. “ I think I could, Delight.”

She looked at him, half frightened again.

“ I haven't time,” she said. Then she dropped her face in her hands.

“ What do you mean, Delight? ”

She never knew afterwards how she came to do it. But she found herself telling him everything.

In one way it was a mistake, because it simply made him plead with her more than ever to marry him instead of Julian. He said everything that anyone would have said under the circumstances—all a lover, or a friend, or even a stranger would have naturally said. She heard him through.

“ You are quite right,” she said then. “ I am doing a mad thing. I oughtn't to do it. It isn't even modest or decent, I know that—but I have to, Everett—oh, I have to! ”

He pleaded with her until it began to get dark, until Dora, anxious and thoughtful as usual, came

out searching for Delight with a cloak, and the warning that she must come in and rest. She took the cloak and sent Dora back, letting Everett come to the door with her. She was very white and tired.

"You can't change me, Everett," she said wearily. "Nothing you can say will. Everything you have said is true, but I am going on."

"Can I come again tomorrow?" he asked.

"Oh—please . . ." she said.

"No, I won't torment you any more. I see it does no good. But I want to help you . . . I want to see you through things. I don't think anybody else can. Or—does Gloria know all about it?"

"Not everything. Not about Julian."

"Then you must let me be all the comfort I can, to you."

"How *can* you?" she asked wonderingly. "If you really care I should think you couldn't . . ."

"I really care. That's why I can."

She looked at him searchingly. He really meant it.

"Come then, please," she said gently. He took her hand again and held it tight for a minute, then lifted his hat and turned away. She mounted the steps to her room with very tired feet, and she

was very glad when she found the ever-watchful Dora standing beside her, ready to undress her, and more than ready to tell her that she must have her dinner in bed, and not be seen until next morning. What anybody else did that night, she neither knew nor cared.

She was up again, feeling pretty much all right next day, but Edna was gone.

"Back home," said Bill agreeably. "Telegram. Useful things, telegrams. We'd . . ."

"Sh-h!" Gloria hushed him in a proprietary manner but his intention of saying that they'd been just as happy if the telegram had happened some time before, was all too plain. He allowed himself to be hushed as far as that particular branch of the conversation went, but he immediately started forth on another.

"When are all our weddings coming off?" he demanded. "After this amazing performance of yours, Jule, with two trusting young females, I think it would be wise to get you tied up at once. As for me I am perennially safe. One girl once engaged to me will try no other. Though Gloria remains engaged to me for ten years she need never worry about my escaping her." He waved the toast he held oratorically, and Gloria giggled.

"I don't worry about you escaping me," she said scornfully. "And if you keep on talking like that I shall probably bribe you to. You'll have that piece of toast on the floor in a minute if you aren't careful."

"You sound like my dear old nurse," he said. "Of course if people are *afraid* to answer my artless questions . . ."

Delight looked apprehensively across at Julian. But she need not. He laughed as he answered Bill.

"All questions answered with neatness and despatch," he answered promptly. "Delight and I intend to get married to each other as soon as—well, as soon as Delight will let me. Personally I'd like to have it happen next week."

"So as to get it out of the way?" suggested Bill cheerfully, but grazing the truth altogether too closely for comfort for the lady in question. Julian answered, as it is often cleverest to do, by the exact truth.

"Exactly, so as to get it out of the way."

"Do you know, my dears, that I think you are quite right," said his mother unexpectedly. "If you postpone it till fall there will be so many other new plans to make along with the necessary things

that attend marrying, and if you do it now you will have the fall to do other things in! ”

Julian laughed outright, while Delight looked at him wild-eyed.

“ That’s a weak argument! You have some dark reason for wanting us out of the way, I can see that. Well—it breaks my heart to go off and leave my new outdoor theater, and never see the plump, elderly Women’s Club doing Greek dances in it—but for your sake, Mother, we might even do that.”

Delight suspected that Mrs. Leroy might have other reasons for wanting to forward the marriage—health, perhaps, like her own. She smiled across the breakfast-table at her—what a pleasant breakfast-table it was, and how much more delightful than yesterday!—and thought that here was one person who really wanted her and cared for her.

CHAPTER XII

"You see, as long as we've started this thing, we might as well see it through in a hurry," Julian said to her, while they paced the porch together after breakfast. She glanced up at him in a way that must have looked frightened, for he pulled her hand a little closer through his arm, and patted it as if he had been her brother.

"You mustn't think I'm going to say brutal things about this affair every time we're starting to discuss it," he said gently. "I've been thinking it all out. I've faced one fact—please don't ever talk to me about it again—that Edna never did love me and never will. She thought Aunt Augusta was going to leave me all her money. She's been trying to get out of it ever since she found that wasn't so. Mother's told me some things—well, as I said, it is something that I don't want to talk about—sort of a sore spot. I don't suppose you love people the way I did her more than once in a life. I've wanted to marry her ever since we were kids together. Now we'll forget about her. . . . About our getting married, you and I, I do think

we'd better hurry it through. I—I want to get off somewhere alone. Things have been happening too fast."

"Very well," she said.

"Could you manage it in about a fortnight? "

She nodded.

"All right," he said, "we'll call it that."

He turned abruptly and left her.

She went on down the walk, to the place where she had sat with Everett Stevenson the day before. She had not expected so much kindness of Julian. The first shock of the new relations over, he settled down to what was apparently a well-thought-out attitude; he was not going to hold any resentment or dislike toward her. He proceeded to be friends with her, without any pretense of love, but with the steady cousinly liking he had had for her from the first. She would have to stand a great deal of conversation about Edna, she was sure, in spite of his prohibition of the subject as far as she was concerned. . . . Well, she had no rights that would give her the excuse of checking him. And the attitude he had taken was more than she had hoped for.

She looked up at a rustle to see Stevenson standing beside her.

"Well, how do things go?" he asked, with just the ordinary friendly look and smile that she was accustomed to.

"Better than I'd hoped," she told him frankly. "Julian is very good to me."

"Why, you poor little girl, what else would you expect—who wouldn't be? And so things are easier—is there anything I can do?"

"Only keep on being kind to me," she said. "I do need you. I do need somebody for a friend that knows all about it. . . . We'll probably be married in about two weeks."

"So soon?"

She nodded. "We both think that it will be best to get it over."

"You poor little thing—it's a wild sea you're starting out to sail on, even if Julian were the kindest man in the world. There isn't much anybody can do to help you. But—if ever I can, don't forget that I want to."

"I won't forget," she said. And then Bill and Julian came up together, arm in arm, singing cheerfully, and the talk was over. But the thought of

Everett was a comfort to her—like money in the savings-bank.

They were married in a fortnight, as they had planned, she and Julian. They went away to a little farmhouse back in the hills, where they were all alone, except that two fields away there was a bigger farmhouse where they walked over and had meals. Julian had not discussed their going-away plans with her; they had simply gone to the place, and he had bought the tickets for it without saying anything about it to her. This made her fairly certain that it was where he was to have taken Edna. But it was another of the things she could not speak to him about.

It would have been perfect, if Julian had cared for her. She tried very hard to live in the present moment, whatever the present moment was like. Generally it was very pleasant. Julian was a naturally gay and affectionate person, with the additional virtue, not so often found in such people, of being thoughtful and considerate. If he had flung himself into this marriage with Delight in a burst of desperation, he did not intend to take it out of her because of that. He went on living very much as usual. The only thing that really hurt Delight in the first few days was his accidental remark that


it would be fun to have old Bill along. Because she knew if she had been Edna he would have wanted nobody else. And of course Edna could do all the things that she could not. So she reminded herself mentally that she had no rights in that direction, smiled, and said that in a couple of weeks they'd be back with Bill and Gloria and Mrs. Leroy. And Julian apparently recollected that what he'd said was a little less than tactful, and replied that he had only been thinking what a shame it was for Bill to miss such fishing as the brook below their little house afforded. And Delight, who had been politely leaving her husband alone as much as she possibly could, wondered a little wistfully if it was very hard to fish in brooks, decided that it would be even harder to suggest her society on fishing-trips to Julian, and let it go at that.

When two kindly and polite people are doing the best they can to get on together, with the cataclysmal fact of marriage now pulling them close in a breath-taking manner, now pushing them apart with a sudden whirlwind of embarrassment, things are apt to be a little tense at times. And things, about the fifth or sixth day, were getting a bit tense. Then the rain rained and the floods came, and Delight, on getting up, called to Julian in the adjoining room

that she was afraid he wouldn't be able to go fishing. She tried to sound highly sympathetic.

Julian made one bound to the window in his pajamas, and said joyously, "Just the day for it! If only the wind doesn't rise any more—" and began to paw violently through his trunk for what proved to be high rubber boots and an oilskin coat which had taken up such a disproportionate amount of room therein that he'd had to omit the tuxedo his mother pressed on him. There were friends, she reminded him, with a country-place all too near, and calls on both sides would be hard to avoid, as these people were not the kind that stopped even for honeymoons. But Julian had replied blithely that if they wanted his society and Delight's, they'd have to realize that on honeymoons people were so up in the air as to forget tuxedos entirely. Whereas fishing was a certainty and rubber boots were a necessity. And anyway, he was going to be a grown-up married person in a few minutes—so he ought to pack his trunk with rubber boots if he wanted to. At which his mother had laughed and given up.

So here were the boots, which Julian showed signs of desiring to put on before anything else; and as soon as they had dashed across the fields, wet and



laughing, to their breakfast, Julian went his way to the brook, and never returned till he met Delight at their noon dinner with a string of fish. She had occupied the morning in writing to the directors of the Mary Lebaron Home about some further improvement that she wanted to suggest. It was pleasant but unexciting, and she looked forward to seeing Julian more than she knew. The wind was rising, but he made for the brook again, after piloting her back and building up a big fire in the Franklin to keep her company.

So she was driven, as before in the other house, to exploring.

The place where they lived would have been impossible for them if they had been in a hotter part of the country. The walls of the two upstairs rooms sloped; there was an old-fashioned kitchen with a fireplace and hooks to hang things, and a fairly large "keeping-room." That was all, and quite enough for the two of them as matters stood.

She began, as one should, with the closets. In her room the closet was just a closet. In it hung her clothes. That was all. In Julian's, next to it, the closet confined itself to being a row of hooks below a row of curtains. The "keeping-room" closet was better; it had andirons in it; to be sure,

the fireplace in Delight's room had been carefully boarded up, but perhaps Julian could take out the boards. She lifted them out and set them down while she looked further. At what she saw she sat back in astonishment.

It wasn't anything touching or romantic. Quite the contrary. It was cans—bright, glittering cans of provisions. Boxes and packages, too, quite fresh—and what on earth were they doing here? She set the andirons thoughtfully on the center-table beside the glass-covered basket of shell flowers; and went into the kitchen. Her guess was right. The kitchen closet, too, was full of food—bacon, crackers—everything but such perishables as milk and eggs. Edna and Julian had been going to play at house-keeping. Well, she could, too.

She began experimenting with the fireplace. She had seen pictures of cooking done that way, on hooks and cranes. The hardest part was moving the wood to make up the fire. She succeeded, finally. By the time Julian was back from his fishing, thoroughly wet and tired, she had managed quite a respectable meal by means of the can-opener. She heard him clatter up the stairs, and then, not finding her, call:

"Delight, Delight! Where are you?"

It sounded almost as though they were people

on a honeymoon, she thought with a little thrill as she answered.

"In the kitchen, Julian, getting supper."

"Supper—where on earth . . ."

He clattered down again, and made for the kitchen.

"And where on earth are you going to get it from? "

He stopped short at the sight of Delight's sparkling face and the old brown half-table which she had pulled out from the wall and set with what dishes she could find.

"Oh, I see," he went on, "you found the stores."

"Yes," faltered Delight. "Didn't you want me to? "

"There was no reason on earth why you shouldn't," Julian said, trying to speak with his usual heartiness. "I was a little surprised, that's all. I promised Dora and Mother and Gloria, separately, that I wouldn't let you do any work. I'd planned to go over to the farmhouse and get you some stuff in a basket for supper and breakfast. But this looks good, and I'm starving. Sure you haven't tired yourself? "

The pleasure was all out of her surprise for Delight. But you can't show that your feelings are

hurt when there is no reason why they should be. And an indefinable chilling and let-down atmosphere around a perfectly kind and solicitous man is not a reason.

"No indeed, I'm not a bit tired. I never feel tired as long as I'm doing anything I like doing," she answered him, smiling as brightly as she could and putting the chocolate on the table.

Julian was hungry, and the Mary Lebaron taught its girls to be good cooks. He ate with appreciation and presently even gaiety. Delight, always caught up and carried along by his mood, became gay, too. When the meal was over he came as a matter of course to help her wash up, and it turned into nearly a frolic. But after they had cleared everything away, Julian gave a little push of distaste to the stores still lying on the table—butter, baking-powder, a can of condensed milk—and said: "Put them out of sight, that's a good girl, Delight. They look—untidy. You don't need to do this any more. And now I think I'll go upstairs and hunt for something in my trunk. I had some sinkers there, I think."

Delight moved silently to the kitchen table and set the things away; the tins of butter and cream on the sill to keep cool, the baking-powder in the

closet, where she had found it. She stood with her back to the kitchen door for a long time after this, quite still, staring at the stairway Julian had just climbed. Her lips shut close. She lifted the lamp and passed into the "keeping-room." A little later Julian, upstairs, heard the front door open. He hurried downstairs.

"Delight, don't go out in that downpour!" he called.

"I'm only posting a letter," she said, coming in from the porch, where a little tin letter-box hung for the R. F. D. man to empty every morning.

She was wrapped in a raincoat, and seemed quite warm and dry when she had taken it off. She turned to Julian with a more assured air than she had worn since their marriage. Her hair curled close around her face with the dampness, and her wonderful eyes were wider and brighter than usual.

"Come into the room and make up a fire. I have something I want to talk to you about," she told him. She took his hand, still confidently, and drew him in.

He bent down before the fireplace and did as she had asked him, a little puzzled. She was a little unlike herself in the way she looked and talked. He wondered if she were going to be ill.

"You'd better run upstairs and put on something dry," he said, looking up from his successful structure of cones and branches. "Don't take any chances."

He had been warned of Delight's delicacy so many times that it was on his mind.

"Very well," she said, still with that warm, assured smile, and laying her hand on his shoulder in more of a caress than she had yet ventured unasked. "But you must be here when I come down."

"Of course," he said. He was still more puzzled. He watched her move out of sight into the little hall, and heard her high heels click up the bare wood of the stairs. He went on with the fire till he had it blazing high, then dropped into the nearest chair to await the latest developments of this strange little second cousin whom—it was usually an afterthought in his realization of her—he had married. She kept him waiting full fifteen minutes, though all he had expected her to do was to put on dry slippers. When she entered the room, holding the candle above her head that she had lighted her way down with, he drew an involuntary breath of admiration, as he had that other time she had stood and called him—when she and Gloria had motored over to the house where he was visiting Bill.

She was not in rose color now, nor as vivid a picture of life and gaiety. But she was softer and more appealing. She wore a loose silk thing, very soft, and wrapped to the soft curve of her figure by two twists of its wide sash—at her breast and hips. She had taken off her shoes and stockings and thrust her feet into violet satin slippers. Her thick gold-brown hair, by some magic he did not know—really it had been combed from the curls Delight had been wearing it in of late to keep its half-length from being too long to wear down—brushed her shoulders. Her slim arms were bare. Every line of her was not only beauty, but softness, lovingness, womanliness. He looked at her and, as he rose, involuntarily reached his hand out to her. She smiled, still with her strong, assured sweetness, and came to him, setting the candle on the mantel. She put her arms about his neck and leaned against him so that he could feel the live softness of her on his breast. She deliberately kissed him of her own accord. Her lips were very soft and sweet, and Julian would have been less than human if his own arms had not tightened about her and his kiss answered hers. But under the thrill was still the little feeling of wonder. She seemed so unlike the shy Delight who,

knowing herself unloved, was very chary of advances.

"Come and sit here," she said, indicating the big old armchair closest to the fire. "And do you mind only firelight?"

Without waiting for an answer she put out the candles that lighted the room. Then she moved, always with certainty, to where Julian was, and sat down on his knees, leaning her head against his shoulder.

"I have something that I've decided you and Edna ought to know," she said. "And I think I can tell it to you better this way, because I'm happiest here—almost as if you loved me. Julian, did you ever wonder how a girl like me could ask a man to marry her, as I did you?"

Julian answered her frankly.

"Yes, I have, Delight, a good many times. It never seemed the sort of thing that belonged with the rest of you."

"It wouldn't normally," she answered. She reached up one hand and stroked the sweep of his hair. "Nor this, either," she said, "unless I really were your wife, that you loved very much. But there is a reason why I've done all these things. I didn't mean to tell you, because you might think I

was trying to make you sorry for me, but tonight, when I saw you so hating to have me touch the stores that you bought to play house with with Edna, I thought it wouldn't be kind not to tell you both all about it. I'm not really delicate; not the kind of delicate that has to be kept from working around the house or getting wet."

"What is it then, child?" demanded Julian, his arms tightening involuntarily around her.

"Something that makes a happy end for us all, if you don't look at it conventionally." She clasped him more closely, as if he could keep away the King of Terrors, and told him in a couple of sentences. "And so you see," she went on quietly, after she had hushed his first exclamations of disbelief and horror, "it makes it all right, all round. You will have all of Cousin Augusta's money, or almost all. Some of it I have plans about, if you don't mind. And you and Edna can be married nearly as soon or maybe sooner than if you'd have to wait and earn money enough to support her and give her all the fun she wants. From the minute she said Cousin Augusta intended you should have the money I knew what I should do."

"But, Delight—but, my poor little Delight—it mayn't be so. It's too horrible an idea," he said.

"It makes me creep to hear you talk about it so calmly."

"It always does people, and yet it's I that have to do it," said Delight with the quietude that comes of long facing anything inevitable. "Cousin Augusta's family doctor—the one you all have—was the one who told me. You believe in him, don't you?"

"He's a very big man," Julian admitted. "Yes, I suppose I'd have to. Backed by other opinions, that is. Did you have any?"

"He went back twice, before he was sure. I thought he said he asked someone else. Yes, I'm sure he did."

"He's a careful old geezer," admitted Julian. Then he sat upright, still holding Delight close in his arms, and spoke to her in a manner half peremptory, half affectionate.

"Now, you listen to me, young woman. You're to put all this out of your head. It may be true or it may not—but neither Edna nor I are pups enough to be sitting around waiting for a dead woman's shoes. You and I are married, and you may as well make the best of it. Your motives were excellent, whichever set you want me to believe in tonight. Personally, being vain, I'd rather believe

you commandeered me for my manly beauty. You ought to let me."

He was laughing about it all! And, impossibly enough, it all seemed easy enough to laugh about, there before the fire in his arms.

"All about some tin cans," he went on. "You silly little thing! You can get all the meals you want to—that is—we—I—never planned anything but breakfasts and suppers here."

"You don't have to stop saying 'we.' I know it was," Delight went on, sitting up away from him. But she could laugh a little too as she said it. She and Julian were getting really to be friends!

"Promise you won't think about it!" he demanded.

"I almost never do, except a little bit in the dark at night," she answered meekly, "and when I have to make plans."

"Not even then—or—well, you can make plans if you'll do it where I can hear you and suppress you for your own good."

"Very well," she answered, still with meekness.

"And now," he concluded, lifting her to her feet, "I don't know how you feel about it, but after wading that brook in the rain all day *I* feel like some well-earned repose. Come now, Delight, if

you want to insist on a life of honest toil, such as getting breakfast tomorrow morning, if this Noah's flood keeps up, bed's the place for you."

"I know it," she said, rising and reaching for her candle. "Good-night."

"Now don't you feel less tragic about all this nightmare you've built up?" demanded Julian, after he had covered the fire, as he followed her upstairs.

"I feel less tragic about you, and the situation in general," she replied.

"There isn't any situation," he told her stoutly.

"You're a real sport, Julian," she told him with a hint of laughter in her voice, but she meant it.

Julian, in his room, sat on the foot of his bed and thought longer than anyone should who had passed a day in such earnest fishing.

"Whether it's true or not, I've got to be good to the poor little soul," he said half aloud to the framed postal-cards on the wall. "I wish she and Mother didn't have such an awful hate on Edna. Women simply can't be fair about other women, I suppose."

What he did not say—what he would scarcely let himself think—was: "I wish I hadn't been in such a depressed frame of mind. Maybe I could have wheeled Edna into shape if I hadn't expected so

much of her. She's only a kid, after all." But the feeling of the thought lurked in his mind.

He got up off the foot of the bed and went into the darkness of Delight's room.

"I'm going to sit right here and hold your hand till you go to sleep," he told her. "There's going to be one night when you don't lie awake having dark-purple thoughts about your dark-purple future."

She reached out her hand in the darkness, gratefully. Oh, they were really going to be friends! And back in the depths of her mind, a thought rather of comfort than otherwise, was the letter Edna Morse would receive at least day-after-to-morrow. She would think it was worth while to wait for Julian after that. And she, Delight, need not feel guilty any more. She went to sleep very happily, holding Julian's hand. She was not very grown-up, after all.

CHAPTER XIII

"I WROTE to Edna about everything," she remembered to tell Julian next morning as she helped him to some of his own brook-trout. He looked at her in astonishment and a little dismay.

"You *didn't*!"

"Yes, I did, and the letter's gone," she told him coolly.

He resigned himself. "Oh, very well,—but it was a silly thing to do. I told you—Edna's not that kind of a girl."

"I won't do it again," said his wife with even more meekness than usual, but a suspicion of amusement in her voice.

"I suppose you're going fishing again this morning, it's so beautiful and wet. Why is it better to fish in the rain—do the fishes get excited and try to climb out of the water into the air, because it's all wet together?"

"*Fish*," not fishes," Julian corrected her firmly.

"Well, *fish*, then. I want you to save part of the day for me. You know, those plans I talked to you about. You *said* I could have plans if you

could censor them. Well, you have to do more than censor; you have to help."

"All right," he said.

Then he paused, and an idea seemed to strike him.

"If you aren't hurt by that sort of thing, why don't you come along?" he asked. "I have a pair of extra boots that I think would fit you. If you don't mind their being . . ."

"Edna's? Not a bit." To herself Delight thought whimsically that Edna's boots were a small matter to a girl who was standing in Edna's shoes!

So they went out together into the rain, by common consent leaving the breakfast to be cleared away at supper-getting time. Edna's boots proved an excellent fit. The excitement of whipping the stream and being whipped by the wind and rain till the pink color was washed off her cheeks and the real color whipped on, made Delight want to laugh and talk far too much for the good of their sport.

They splashed across lots to their meal at the farmhouse, so hungry that Delight ate three pieces of blueberry pie without even knowing she was taking more than the customary amount of dessert. She felt a little tired after another hour's fishing,

and Julian took her to the door of their house and went back himself for further sport.

She bathed and changed to something light and pretty, got the fire started in the "keeping-room," cleared away the remains of their breakfast, then went back to the "keeping-room" with a handful of papers, which she put on the table. After that there was nothing to do but a little mending, and a good deal of waiting for Julian. She applied herself contentedly to both, singing softly over her work. She could never remember the six million dollars or Dora's anxiety for work sufficiently to let her mending pass into other hands.

Julian clattered in, at length, squashed loudly upstairs, and came violently down again in a very short time, dry all but his hair.

"Well, Delight, did you say plans?" he asked. "You look simply drowned in them—I never saw anybody so impressive."

She nodded, sitting by the table with her papers.

"Yes, I said plans, Julian," she said as he sat down across from her. "You always expected that part of Cousin Augusta's money would go in charities, didn't you?"

He assented.

"Nobody thought much of it would go anywhere else."

"Then you wouldn't feel that I was unfair if I used, say, a third of it for—not charities exactly—but things to make people have more of a chance?"

"Why, of course not. It's your money, Delight."

"I don't feel that way about it. It's as much yours as mine," she said, shaking her head and looking up at him seriously.

"What long eyelashes!" he thought irrelevantly, and said so aloud. Delight colored up, and dropped them on her cheeks in confusion, which made them show still more.

"Never mind my eyelashes," she said, trying not to laugh. "I want to talk plans with you."

"Eyelashes are better," said Julian teasingly. "And hair. I say, Delight, what made you bob your hair?"

"Cousin Augusta snipped it off, because the doctor said it was sapping my strength," she told him laconically. "It's growing again, though. I'll have to have it cut again soon, or pin it up. Which would you do?"

"Pin it up," Julian told her promptly. "It was pretty enough the other way, and all right for a flapper, but you're a respectable married person

now, and you ought to wear your hair up. And maybe a cap."

"You're laughing at me!" said Delight, laughing herself.

"No, I'm not. I'll go upstairs and get you some hairpins and a comb. After we've tried how it looks up, we'll tackle your plans."

"Please, our plans?" pleaded Delight.

"All right, *our* plans," he called back over his shoulder as he went.

He brought a mirror that stood up, too, being a thoughtful person, and superintended her gravely while she tried whether, brushed to its full length, it would really go up or not. Finally it did, pinned loosely above her ears and in the back, each piece fastened with extravagant quantities of hairpins.

"Now, we can go to work," announced Julian. "Do you know I rather like the way you do things people tell you to, Delight."

Something of a change from Edna. The thought flashed into Delight's mind, but she said nothing. She wondered a little wistfully, too, if things had been different, whether Julian perhaps in the end might learn to like her better than Edna. . . . But things were as they were. She drew the papers toward her, with its list, and began to talk.

"Did you always have a good time out of life, Julian?"

"Yes," he said directly. "I didn't always have as much money as the fellows I trained with, but I always had as much fun or more. Mother saw to that. Lord! I don't know how she managed it—but she did, all right. Some mother."

"Yes," she said. "Then it will be harder to explain to you. You see, Julian, what I want to do is to find some scheme for giving a chance for good times to people who never have any. Nearly everybody gives money for food or clothing or education."

"They're quite good things to have, you know," interposed Julian.

"Oh yes. But other people give *them*. But think of the nice self-respecting, hard-working girls, secretaries and governesses and mothers' helpers and teachers and bookkeepers and . . ."

"Yes, Delight," said Julian dejectedly, "I am thinking about them. All at once. I shall probably burst into tears if you name any more professions."

"Then try to think of college men you know who never had any fun—if you ever got near enough one," said Delight indignantly. "You don't know

what it is not to have a good time. You've said so yourself. You had a fairer deal than the rest of us, anyway. You're always so light-hearted and full of health and energy and whatever it is that's called charm, that you're—you're a sort of a self-starter. When you come into the room it all brightens up, and everything feels gayer. I've watched it happen many a time." She spoke simply, but Julian flushed.

"See here, Delight, that's dangerously near jolly-ing."

"I wasn't! I was attacking you!" she told him.

"Well, don't shoot! I'll come down. Yes, I *did* know some fellows that hadn't much chance for good times."

"Well, I want them to!" she said triumphantly. "There's one thing. I can't do a lot—I can only do it for one men's college. Don't you see? There must be some way to establish a fund, with trustworthy trustees, for hard-working boys without a scrap of margin. Strictly on condition that they spend it on the things that get them into frats, and on dress clothes and taking girls out . . ."

"If found applying same to support of starving mother, to be shot," Julian finished for her. "I don't quite see. Now, don't go up in the air, Delight.

I was only being momentarily frivolous. There's a lot in it, and with the proper sort of conditions and trustees—it could be worked perfectly well. Jove, I *have* pitied some of those fellows, wanting fun as much as anybody, and not a chance at it. Only I never saw how it could be fixed till now. You're a wonder, Delight! ”

“ You don't really think it's foolish, then? ”

“ Foolish? Not a bit! It ought to have been done ages ago, if anybody but you had ever had the sense. The same endowment for some girls' college, too, I suppose? ”

“ Yes. Cousin Maud says my mother was a college woman. I'd like to choose her college for the endowment. I've written to ask which it is.”

“ To Mother, you mean? ”

“ Yes.”

“ Well, so far it is pretty easy. We'll have to go to the heads of the different colleges and get their blessings. They'll want to deflect it to baseball scholarships, or professors' salaries, or something else equally futile, but your brave Julian won't let 'em. Oh, we can fix all that up like stringing beads! But what about your governesses, seamstresses—I forget the rest—they sounded like an Intelligence Office list. They'll be harder to reach.”

"Yes, and so will the corresponding men. That will be a more personal matter, all round. But we'll have to work out a way for doing it. Being young ourselves will make it easier. They won't be so likely to think we're professional uplifters."

"I'll do the girls' end and you do the men," suggested Julian. "I know how. I've seen poor old Aunt Augusta's husband, Uncle John. You look them in the eye, and say severely, 'Sister, how is your soul?' But you are careful to act as if you knew they didn't have one."

"I think you'd better let me have the girls, if that's your idea of how to do it," Delight told him, smiling. "No, I think the only way would be for us to hire somebody to give parties for them."

Julian looked a little puzzled still.

"It still seems complicated," he ventured.

Delight brightened.

"You know how, in novels, poor women with good social positions hire themselves out to introduce rich parvenus into society? I've been thinking that there really must be such women—indeed, I was almost certain of one or two at Cousin Augusta's. My idea is this: let them be furnished money to give parties at their houses, partly of nice men and girls they know, partly of men and girls who haven't

had the nice times. Nice boys, who are alone and staying in New York—social secretaries. I won't go down my list again, but you know the kind I mean; the kind I *was*. Will you help me? ”

“ Sure I'll help you, and I can get a lot of other people too,” he said enthusiastically. “ I can think of lots of fellows this minute that would be crazy to get a chance at a dance like that. You'll have to hand-pick the girls.”

“ Easy enough—too easy,” she said, sighing a little. “ They're in all the houses and all the offices in New York, just as eager, and young, and pretty as the daughters of the people who employ them. Oh, Julian! All we can do is such a drop in the bucket, after all! ”

She looked up from her notes, half laughing, half despairing. A ray of unexpected sunshine struck through the diamond panes and lay across her hair. She looked very pretty and very young.

Julian took the papers forcibly away from her, took her hands and pulled her up standing.

“ Everything is a drop in the bucket,” he told her very sensibly. “ Suppose you could give a good time to every man, woman, and child in America, there'd be Europe still on your conscience. And when you'd get them all to disporting themselves, there'd still

be Asia and Africa ungladdened. Think, as old Uncle John used to say, 'of all the teeming millions of China!' I used to do it, too. I was an obliging little kid—only my mind would always stray off wondering how they teemed. And now the Child Philanthropist is to walk out of this, and get a gun, and go rabbit-shooting with her faithful coadjutor. The sun's out. Think of the teeming millions of rab"

"Oh, really, to learn to shoot, myself?" she interrupted with dancing eyes.

"Really, yourself. On second thoughts we might start with tin cans today, and work up to the rabbits tomorrow. Then perhaps by the time we go back we may have worked up through the animal kingdom to a Bolshevist or something. Come along, Delight."

They trudged together through the wet grass with guns over their shoulders, Delight rejoicing in the fact that there was nobody to call after her, "You're going to get your feet wet!" She was, and she knew it. And as long as she changed when she got in, it didn't matter a bit. Julian said so.

"I believe you're getting so you don't miss Bill," Delight ventured daringly. He turned and smiled

down at her, his large brown eyes almost closing in a way they had when he laughed or was very much amused or pleased.

"I like you nearly as well as I do Bill," he told her teasingly. She took him in earnest and was pleased.

"Really, Julian, do you?"

"Really, little goose! Why, I like you a lot better, of course."

Delight sighed contentedly. Men were strange. But as long as the strangeness worked pleasantly for her, she was willing they should be. She hadn't expected that he would get to liking her better than Billy, so soon as this.

They did not get as high in the scale as rabbits, that day. But when they came back to the farmhouse for supper,—for they had mutually agreed that after the intensity of the life they had been leading, it was better to buy supper than to cook it,—they felt so happy and so well with the world and each other, that they discussed philanthropy till twelve that night. Taking it by and large, it was a very satisfactory honeymoon, unpromising as the material had seemed. Her husband, it seemed to Delight, gave her as much as she could expect, if not more—liking, comradeship, care and a very

real interest in her doings. She wanted more, terribly, of course. But she was grateful for what she had.

She went back to her old habit of the visions of year-after-next. In year-after-next, she and Julian—staid old householders then!—would come back to this very place to live their honeymoon over again. Her hair would be grown long again, but she would be pink-cheeked all of herself, without having to steal upstairs and put on Gloria's rouge, when Julian wasn't looking. She would be all well and strong, and gay and full of spirits all the time. And they would bring Dora this time: not that Delight couldn't do everything Edna would have done, but that there would be an extra something to take charge of. There would be a baby by then, with Julian's gaiety, and her own eyes. Julian thought she had lovely eyes; he had said so. He would like to see them again in a baby.

"What are you blushing so for, all by yourself?" inquired Julian at this stage of her thoughts. "You looked as if you had just remembered a terrific crime and been overwhelmed by it."

"I was only telling myself fairy-tales," she answered him, "and they get embarrassing."

"I say! Do you do that too?" he demanded,

looking at her alertly. It was the end of a long day well spent in scouring the country on a couple of horses that, though not strictly speaking saddle-horses, could be ridden. At least they were. So both of them were pleasantly tired, and sank in a big chair apiece on either side of the fire, Delight with knitting, Julian with a fishing-line which, at his present lazy rate of progress, it would take several evenings to untangle.

"Yes," she answered him. "I wonder—why, I wonder, Julian, if everybody doesn't?"

"Very likely," said Julian, deep in the tangles of his line once more.

"What were yours?" she demanded point-blank.

"Oh, the usual sort of thing, I guess," he said. "To get a yacht, and sail anywhere I liked, for one thing. Pack her full of all the people I liked and just beat it. And to go to Europe my own way, not see the proper things people thought you ought to see, you know, but just drift as you darn pleased. Of course what I want more than anything else is to be a big architect, as well known as Stanford White, and leave buildings behind me that would be monuments to me for generations. Of course you can't call that a fairy-tale. It's something you only get by hard work and by having talent besides. But

you really can get it, if luck's your way. The rest—they're just fairy-tales. I like 'em, though."

"But you forget they needn't be fairy-tales. I suppose it's too late to go around the world in a yacht—we'd run into bad weather, would we? But the other thing, traveling in Europe, is easy enough. I'd like to go, a lot. I'd go just where you wanted me to—I wouldn't be in the least like an official guide, because I know lots less about it than you do, probably. Shall we? "

"Shall we? We certainly shall if you really like it. We'll do it nearly as soon as we get back, and have the Pleasures for the Pleasureless running. I keep forgetting that we can do about what we please. Here, I'll write for folders and prospectuses and things, this identical minute, as Mrs. Crossett at the farm says."

He rose and began to scabble wildly for stationery.

"Do you know," he remarked, as he settled himself to his task, "we haven't had a scrap of mail since we've been here, and I've never missed it? "

"Nor I," Delight answered, but as she spoke she thought it was very likely that one or the other of them should get one letter, anyway. Edna would answer Delight, or write Julian.

It was Julian she wrote to. He came in next evening to find the letter waiting for him, and opened it without comment. When he had read it through he looked at Delight in a perplexed way.

"It's from Edna. She says she wants to talk to me, and won't I meet her at the Wyndham hotel, on my way back from here. She must mean both of us. At least, she knows I couldn't leave you up here."

"You might leave me outside the door, or in the car, though," Delight told him a little mischievously.

"I've no reason for solitary conversations with Edna. We're through with all that," he said.

"You'd better see her alone," said Delight; but he stood firm.

When their honeymoon was over and their trip back in the motor brought them as far as Wyndham, Delight begged again to be left outside in the car, while Julian went in and called Edna up. But he insisted on her coming in so strongly that all she could do was to obey, and efface herself as much as possible in the secluded corner near where Julian waited.

As she stood back, a quiet, inconspicuous figure in the gray cloak and the gray veil that she had wrapped about her head and face during the long

motor-trip up, she saw someone dashing across the hotel lobby—someone she thought she knew. Edna—yes, unquestionably Edna, with a bright blue cape billowing out behind her as she ran, and the blue and orange plume on her hat flying back. She was like a little bright bird or butterfly, darting across a field. Julian stood out to meet her, a tall, unmistakable figure; but Delight dropped into a chair where she would be even less noticed than before. She did not in the least want to meet or talk to Edna. Talks to Edna recalled themselves as a row of little stings of gnats, borne one after the other week after week.

“Julian, you dear, to come and meet me,” she shrilled, snatching both his hands. “I made up my mind that I mustn’t lose a possible minute before I saw you and got everything straight, and set your mind at rest, you poor boy! Julian, you needn’t have the least bit of fear about it. I’ll wait for you, I’ll wait even if it’s a year from now. I’ll—what’s the matter?” For Julian had dropped her hands and backed unmistakably.

“I told my wife,” he said in a voice that was low indeed, but so clear-cut that Delight did not miss a word of it, “that you weren’t such a pup as to count on dead women’s shoes. It seems I was wrong.

. . . If you can't understand that, Edna, try to grasp this—you needn't wait. In fact, it's a case of 'Home James,' for you. Good-by."

He turned his back full on her. She stood before him silent from astonishment, her red lips half open and her eyes staring.

"Julian!" she said ineffectively, in a moment, "I—I . . ."

He did not speak a word. She gave a little laugh after another minute.

"Oh, very well," she said, and walked on past him and out the far door.

Julian stirred as if he was coming out of a dream. He looked around for Delight, and finally saw her half hidden in her big chair. He went over to her and put his hand on her shoulder very gently.

"I didn't know she was that sort of a person—honestly I didn't, dear," he said, exactly as a little boy would have said it. Delight felt a wave of pity for him going all over her; she answered him exactly as she would if he had been ten.

"Of course you didn't, Julian. Never mind."

"Come on home," he said suddenly, apparently picking up the threads of life again and smiling at her.

She rose and went out with him to the car, where

he established her with more than his usual tenderness. He dropped beside her and put his arm about her. It felt warm and close.

"Well, thank goodness, I married you, you dear!" he said irrelevantly, and kissed her.

They drove on back to Elsinore, where Mrs. Leroy awaited them. They were both very quiet; Delight, looking sidewise and shyly at Julian, tried to guess from his looks how things were with him. It was hard to do. He looked very serious, but he sometimes looked serious when he was thinking of nothing more than how to disentangle a fishing-line or solve some problem of his work. She tried to imagine how she herself would feel if she had just discovered that someone she had thought as honorable as herself wasn't honorable at all—someone she had cared for. It would be a shock, anyway, and she wouldn't want to be talked to. . . . But she had come to that conclusion anyhow. . . . She would probably feel a little as if she didn't want to see the person who had taken the other person's place, for a little while at least. Nothing is harder to stand than that. At least, so she had always read.

But life isn't always like the books. Sometimes,

Delight had discovered in her months out of Cousin Augusta's keeping, it is much more unpleasant. Sometimes, in ways that the books never seem to remember to tell you, it is much more delightful. So she gave it up once more, and merely kept quiet, which was safe at least.

She had forgotten the necessity for seeming as gay as the usual people coming back from a honeymoon; she was recalled to it by Julian's drawing a long breath, as if he were bracing himself for something. She looked up from the gray gloves in her lap, which she had been staring at, and saw that they were almost on the house. Yes—there was the fateful open-air theater glinting through the trees—was it possible that it was still there, and the leaves still on the trees, though so much had come and gone?—and Gloria and Mrs. Leroy and Bill on the porch, waving to them. . . . Yes, and two more figures, that must be Everett Stevenson and his mother—how nice of them to have come over the day she and Julian were expected back!

Julian's long breath had carried him to the kind of manner he wanted, apparently. He helped her out of the car and came up the porch beside her, bringing with him the breeze of gaiety that was normally his: kissing his mother in the middle of affec-

tionate greetings and laughter, shaking hands with Bill and demanding of him if he had never left the place, making a rallying sort of fuss over Gloria, being delightfully courteous to the Stevensons, and even saying something to Dora, who stood respectfully but none the less eagerly in the shadow of the door. Delight, braced by his example, found herself kissing and being kissed, and relaxing herself to the pleasure of being back among the people who cared for her, even to the extent of feeling momentarily that there wasn't any problem.

It was Everett Stevenson who reminded her of it. She had been feeling, as she phrased it to herself afterwards, just like a real bride, till he spoke to her, after his greetings, a little aside.

"How goes it?" he asked softly. "Have things been pleasant so far?"

She felt an irrational annoyance with him. Just as she had got to the point of feeling that things were—not so transitory a thing as "pleasant," but *real*—real and all right! He flung her back to her old place as a masquerader. Oh, why had she been such an idiot as to yield to her desire to have somebody know all about it, and tell him everything? The more people thought things were all right, the more armor she had against their being wrong.

Affairs between her and Julian were no outsider's business. . . .

"That's what being married does, I suppose," she remembered. "Even as little married as this . . . how queer! . . . Anyway, I can't blame Everett for standing still while I've moved."

Nevertheless her voice was more impersonal than she knew in her reply, and Everett stepped back as if he had come too close.

"Why, yes indeed, thank you!" she said courteously, and almost formally. "We did have some rain, but it was such an adorable little farmhouse that the rain merely gave us an excuse for having it to play with. The rainy days were fun, weren't they, Julian?"

"Sure! More fun than some of the shiny ones. Remember the day when we went all over the house stopping up mouse-holes? We made a sort of euchre out of it, Stevenson. Winner—that was the one who found the most holes—had to set all the traps. Fine indoor sport."

Why maybe he *had* enjoyed himself.

Delight did not give sufficient weight to the fact that anyone of Julian's temperament, naturally joyous, took life much more as he found it, and got much more fun out of it as he went along, than

anyone like herself, who thought things over from as many angles as she could reach. She herself though she remembered those mouse-holes tenderly, had sat down before at at least three of them and wondered if Julian wouldn't have preferred mouse-holing with Edna.

"You must be *dead* tired," said Gloria, interrupting Julian ruthlessly. "Come on upstairs, Delight. I've given my room to Julian, but I have a much better one that I want to show you."

Gloria was evidently bursting to tell and be told, and Delight followed her. Gloria was the one person with whom she had absolutely no feeling of keeping up appearances.

CHAPTER XIV

"Now, to begin with, how do you feel?" demanded Gloria, establishing Delight in a long chair, with many cushions.

Delight, who had been acting with much success on the principle that she was all right, and needed no more cushions than the rest of the world, took the attention with gratitude but some bewilderment.

"I feel very well," she said truthfully.

"Good girl! And how does being married to Julian work? Is he as nice at close range as when he's somebody else's beau?"

Delight smiled.

"If he wasn't, you wouldn't expect me to say so!" she said with some fire. "But he is."

"If he wasn't of course I'd expect you to say so. What's life for, if you always have to pretend you feel just the way you ought to feel? I'd go mad if I did that. Hangover from Cousin Augusta, I suppose."

"Well, he is," said Delight.

"It must be nice to have anybody that can talk as easily as Julian adoring you," said Gloria med-

itatively. "Now, I know I have Bill's whole heart, what there is of it—but the nearest he can get to kind words is to say 'Gee, you *are* a looker!' in his wildest transports."

Delight smiled. It *was* nice to be back with Gloria again.

"But you know he means it," she said with unconscious wistfulness.

"Oh yes, he means it," said Gloria briskly. "And I suppose that has to do. Delight, you have no more anemia than I have. You look lots better."

A little faint hope stirred in Delight's heart. She had been feeling better. . . . But it wouldn't be playing fair to get better, so it was just as well that there was—when she came to face it squarely—no escape. She had a right to stop thinking about things and be happy while she might. That was all.

"I'm glad you think so," she said. "Gloria, how long can you stay with us? We're thinking of taking a nice long sea voyage, in a yacht, you know, till we want to turn around and come back. First I have to start some things going—Julian's going to help me. We'll have to be going to various places to do it. Would you rather stay here till we're through that, and then go on the yacht, or is there something you ought to do in New York?"

"To tell you the truth," confessed Gloria, "I want to go to New York and buy fall clothes. I feel like a rag doll—I've been here so long without a day's shopping. Besides, Bill . . ."

"Exactly—Bill. I suppose he has to go somewhere else."

She nodded.

"He does. And you've no idea how queer life seems without him. I tried it for three days while you were gone, and, my dear, I missed him *horribly*. Just think—Bill! "

"I don't know why not Bill," Delight said.

"Oh . . ."

"Here, where's my wife?" demanded Julian, putting his head in at Gloria's door. "Delight, I have no idea in the world where Dora is to put your things, and she says she hasn't either, though I think it's merely a dark scheme to get you where she can talk to you."

"All right, I'm coming," said Delight, following him.

"Somebody else thinks life is queer without their nearest and dearest," whispered Gloria as they passed out. Delight smiled at her bravely. If it had only been true!

Julian was quite right. It was a ruse of Dora's

to get Delight where she could see something of her. She established her mistress on a couch, much as Gloria had done—Delight had forgotten how her world had wont to be sown with couches—and put away clothes without so much as a word as to where she should do it, in exactly the right places. All the while she kept up an intermittent fussing over Delight, interspersed with a very evident desire to know how she was getting on with Julian. Delight was able to tell her that things were going on very nicely indeed. All the while she was wishing that Julian would come to her and talk it out with her, as he had things about Edna, before. But he didn't. He was up with his mother, giving her what Delight knew was about as carefully edited an account of the honeymoon as she herself had given to Gloria and Dora.

They rested, as they had agreed, at the house in Elsinore, for a week longer. Meanwhile they wrote letters to heads of colleges, and received other letters from them. It was exactly as Julian had prophesied; the heads of colleges knew of many, many other things which the colleges needed very much more than they did a fund to supply unnecessary pleasures to poor and hard-working students. From the college athletic fund (this was a prosperous Eastern

college) to the chapel roof (this was a Western one, which so obviously wasn't rich that they sent it a cheque for the roof anyway on the spot), each and every college and university had innumerable ways and means for money to go which were far, far more necessary than such a trivial thing as self-respect and pleasure for its hard-working, pleasureless boys and girls. They hinted that Julian and Delight, with the best of intentions, were doing something Economically Wrong.

Julian flared up as he tossed the fourteenth, or thereabouts, letter on the table.

"Athletic funds are a darn sight more economically wrong than anything we've planned!" he cried. "Good athletics make a prosperous college; they're a business necessity. I ought to know—I was on the team, and it was the best little old team you ever saw. But as for these idiots trying to coax us to spend our own money to suit them, not ourselves, I think they have a nerve!"

"You said they'd do exactly this," Delight reminded him in a voice intended to be calming, but which was so full of laughter as to fail completely. "Now what shall we do?"

"Do? Write back and tell them that it's all or nothing; that their old Preferable Objects are noth-

ing whatever in our existence; and that if they want to help us administer the funds we mentioned for the purposes mentioned, we'll be delighted—if not, we'll get the nearest social service bureau or unit or whatever it may be, to pull off the thing for us—and get the credit."

"You *are* clever," mused Delight. "How did you know how to do that?"

He looked at her, gay and interested, with an expression she did not quite know how to interpret; a quick shadowing of his face, followed by as swift a return to its usual look of brightness. She had seen it several times of late.

"I didn't know. It was just my usual brilliancy," he said, smiling. "I suppose on the old if improper principle of telling a baby that Doggie will drink the nice milk if he won't. They used to do that to me, I regret to say—at least, Mother regrets it, for she's read since in books that it's all wrong."

"It's all right for these fussy old college people, anyway," Delight said decisively. "Come on, let's write to every one of them about Doggie—and make it quite, quite clear that he will lap it up eagerly."

"We will," said he, beginning on the spot at the fourteenth letter—the one which had moved him

to desperation. Delight slipped paper in the typewriter and attacked the thirteenth.

It was not quite accurate to say that they impressed the idea that Doggie would drink the milk on all the universities, because to only two of these could they give the endowment. What they eventually did was to choose the two universities, one for men and one for women, which had replied to them in the least authoritative tones. Then they lay back and waited to see what would happen.

What did happen was just what Julian had said would. The chosen universities, unable to guide the flow of gold, decided to take it anyway on the terms Delight and Julian wished: that is, they were the fund's trustees, and volunteered to see that a committee of carefully chosen and kind men and women (Delight especially insisted on the "kind" clause) should each year look over such students as were working their way through, and unostentatiously, under strict pledge of secrecy ("or else everybody that's looking for a soft thing will make for that college and be poor," warned the worldly-wise Julian), give those students enough extra money to enable them to buy fit clothes for social affairs, and keep up their end decently, socially speaking.

"The next thing is to go and see how it works ourselves," Julian announced. "Do you think you're fit for it, Delight?"

"Fit for it? I should think I was! I never felt so well in my life," she said, laughing.

"Do you really? Why, then . . ." he began, his face flushing. She wondered what he had been going to say. They had agreed not to discuss her health. "Why, then, we'll start tomorrow," he went on, patently not at all as he had begun.

"Very well," she said.

Life was coming more and more to be made up of queer turns—strange places that she didn't understand. And she had not the courage to drive ahead and force things to a straight understanding. She had done all of that she felt capable of. She had somehow lost the bravery, or desperation, that had carried her to where she was now. She felt—not exactly baffled—but timid—as if now what she must do was to wait and let life do very much what it desired to with her. She did not exactly realize it, but at the bottom of all her feelings was a wish to please Julian as much as possible, to make up to him for what she had done, to let things be as passive as they could, so that he could move them as he wanted to.

Nevertheless, it was the impetus of her plans which still carried them along.

The college year had begun at the university they went to first, the one where Delight's mother had been educated. They made an appointment for luncheon with the Dean, a charming and gracious lady, who, in spite of her charm and grace, found it hard to hide her surprise at the astonishing youth of her philanthropists.

"I know we're younger than you expected," Julian told her, promptly taking the bull by the horns; "but you see Aunt Augusta—that's Mrs. Denegar, you know—died and left my wife her money before we got any older."

Then the Dean laughed, and that broke the ice, and everybody felt better.

She did not seem to think their idea so mad as they had expected she would. She made one or two difficulties, mainly about the hard time the university would have finding the right kind of trustees; but under the pressure of Julian's charm and Delight's eager sweetness she finally admitted that there were people in the world, nay, even in the town where the college was located, who would be suitable and sympathetic.

"You can arrange it without a great deal of

trouble," Julian urged. "Get hold of professors with human feelings. They always have a line on their classes, and would generally know the ones to pick. We don't want to dictate a thing about the how of it. The only thing we want to be sure of is that the right ones get helped. I'm sure you can fix up plans that will ensure that."

The Dean thought she could, and they went away that afternoon, with a plan nearly perfected in all its details, whereby the girls who had no money for anything but bare necessities were to be given enough to make life comfortable and more or less amusing; and very, very carefully, so as not to hurt their pride.

The male college was harder to deal with. They learned afterward that their path had been smoothed by the fact that the Dean herself had worked her way through college. They had noticed at the time that one of her proposals had been to have as many of the professors on the board of selection as possible, women who had done this. The Dean of the men's college had no such past to mellow him, and was correspondingly harder to manage. Delight took the helm here. She explained and argued and nearly coaxed, in the end getting him to accept

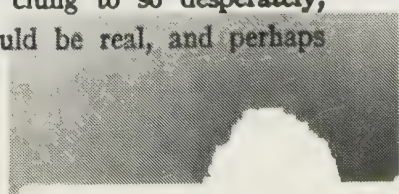
nearly the same plan that the other Dean had worked out with them.

"And now we'll stay over for the game, and go home," said Julian, when these duties were done. "I may as well tell you that I timed this visit so there would be a game to stay over to!"

Nothing is pleasanter than a good time after you've cleared everything you ought to do out of the way—unless, as Julian suggested when Delight said so, it's a good time when you've deliberately dropped everything you ought to do in the middle and run off. They had a delightful time at the game, and nobody, as Delight had half feared, asked Julian where Edna was, and why Delight wasn't Edna. If she had but known it, the real feeling in the air, so far as Julian's classmates had any feeling, was that her not being Edna was an excellent thing. She went back, with an agreeable little warm feeling of having been liked, around her heart—but she did not go back to the city. The weather was so perfect that she and Julian each discovered in the other a sneaking desire to stay at Elsinore, and accordingly did it. Mrs. Leroy had not seemed as well lately as they could wish, and the climate at Elsinore was much better for her than that of New York.

They went on with the final plans Delight had made; these could be carried on for a while at least by correspondence. The first thing was for them to find a suitable woman for their purpose, and they were writing to three or four of Mrs. Leroy's friends, women with less money than social position, to feel them out and see if they would do. And all of this, so Mrs. Leroy said wistfully, could be arranged just as well from Elsinore as from New York. Neither Julian nor Delight really wanted to return to the big old gloomy mansion that was redolent of Boards and Associations and stiff dinner-parties, and Cousin Augusta's frank statements of what she thought about you.

Delight's real feeling about it was that as long as they were out here in the country things were tentative—that she could live from day to day and like it. Back in New York, she knew, the atmosphere of that house would force her to sitting down and facing things as she didn't want to face them. The lights would go out of the theater, and the thrill out of the music, and the play would be played by raw, disillusioning daylight. All the glamour of year-after-next, that she clung to so desperately, would fade. Things would be real, and perhaps dreadful. . . .



And she would not have Everett Stevenson to talk to.

She had made the discovery lately that a man, when he wants to, can be much more sympathetic than a girl. Everett was the only person on earth, beside Julian, who knew all about everything. To Julian she had to keep up a vividness and gaiety and—or so she felt—the sort of swift light-heartedness which Edna had been able to feel all the time. With Everett she could let go and be herself, heart-sick and dispirited sometimes, and, though she still faced it gallantly, growing a little frightened as the end of things promised to come closer. And Everett, drifting in to see her now nearly every day while Julian was at his work—for he was going on with some drafting now, and worked on it nearly all the mornings, at plans for a prize design—was an infinitely understanding friend. There was nobody to tell Delight that she shouldn't see so much of Everett. Mrs. Leroy usually spent these morning hours in her own room, and Gloria, the frank, was gone. Julian or Dora might have spoken, but neither did. Delight did not realize how much immunity from anything but loving-kindness her condition gave her, in the strait-laced old servant's eyes.

So it grew to be her habit to spend the mornings

on one of the garden-seats, sewing or knitting or embroidering, with Everett beside her, talking or being talked to. She did not own it to herself, but she was surer of his feeling for her than of Julian's. So she leaned on him harder. It isn't fair, but it's the way things happen. If she was selfish, if he winced sometimes when she talked to him innocently about her feeling for Julian, she did not think it was so. It was his affection, not his love, that she was certain of. She had taken him completely at his word, that he was there always, to help her if she was unhappy or in trouble. She talked things out with him, sure that nothing she said or did was anything but pleasant in his eyes. And this is a very pleasant way to feel about any person.

She came in from one of these long talks, feeling quiet and comforted, on a glorious October day about luncheon-time. Julian was just running down the stairs, and called to her.

"Signal victory!" he said. "I've succeeded in inducing Mother to see Drake!"

She looked up, startled. Drake was the family doctor, the man who had told her that she had only a year to live. She had not known that Julian wanted to have his mother see the doctor. She wished he hadn't. The idea of seeing him herself,

even passing through the house, was horrible to her. He stood to her for the dreadful moment when she had heard, all of a sudden, that there was no year-after-next for her ever.

"Why, did you think she ought to see him?" she asked, startled.

"Yes. Her heart needs looking over every so often, whether—so to speak—it needs it or not. She hasn't much faith in other doctors. So she's promised to be good and let him come down."

"That's good," said Delight as heartily as she could, and they went into luncheon, where, as Mrs. Leroy was present, nothing more was said.

Next day, as changeless and immutable as Fate, Dr. Drake turned up. Delight welcomed him nervously. She did hope that he wouldn't say anything more to her. She cherished a wild hope that he might forget he had ever seen her before. But nothing of the sort could be expected from an elderly and urbane physician, who had been known and loved by the whole of the family connection for a generation at least. He greeted her in the most friendly manner possible, hoped congratulations were not too late to be in order, and, even to Delight's unsuspecting eyes, was clearly looking her over and wondering how she was.

She wanted to run and hide. She had been feeling very far from well lately. The old dizziness, which had gone for a while, had returned, worse than ever. So had the languor, and feeling that nothing was really very much worth doing. Oh, she knew—she knew well enough—but to have it told her all over again seemed to her more than she could stand.

Julian, behind him, looked at her with more than usual intensity, too, or so it seemed to her overstrained nerves.

“We’ll take your mother first,” said Dr. Drake with a hateful cheeriness. “Then, I understand, young man, you want your wife looked at?”

“Exactly,” Julian said quietly, but with a finality which he seldom used. When he did, Delight always knew she might as well do what she was told. She turned her eyes from the doctor to him in terror. It seemed to her such a needless cruelty.

“Come along upstairs, young lady,” said Dr. Drake. She looked from his smiling face to Julian’s, which was not smiling; indeed, little happier than her own. But it showed no signs of letting her off, and for very shame’s sake she knew she could not fight being looked over. Doctors *did*.

She followed the doctor up into Mrs. Leroy’s room,

and watched while her mother-in-law, half laughing, half protesting, was very thoroughly examined.

"Pretty good condition," was his verdict. "Your new daughter must take good care of you—or perhaps the quiet life here helps a bit, too. You shouldn't live in New York, Maud. I've been telling you so for twenty years."

Mrs. Leroy shrugged her shoulders, and laughed.

"You have, indeed. It's time you scolded somebody else. Delight, it's your turn. Let the doctor scold you."

The ordeal was harder, because of the necessity which Delight remembered of keeping up. There was Mrs. Leroy's weak heart.

The doctor went to work at her—blood-pressure, needle stuck in her, stethoscope—how many instruments had he brought, anyway?—and finally a rain of questions, which she answered as well as she could. He lifted his eyebrows slightly once. That was all the sign he showed.

Finally he sat her down in a chair, as if she had been a small girl, and smiled—actually laughed.

"I *was* an old fool," were his first, frightening words.

He stared down at the slide he had put the

specimen of her blood on, and looked up again, still smiling.

"What—what do you mean?" she asked him, holding her voice still by a tremendous effort.

He told her, as baldly as he had before.

"I thought I got it unmistakably right. I thought it was pernicious. I was wrong. It wasn't. You're practically a well woman—and—" here the smile broadened again—"you're going to do more than get well."

Her lips formed a "What?", but it was all she could do. Then she managed to speak again.

"You must be wrong. You must. I—I'm dizzy—I'm faint—the stupid feelings, and the lazy feelings—they're worse than ever. I—you must be wrong. . . ."

His expression of beaming benevolence never changed. He merely patted her on the shoulder.

"I quite believe you, my dear. They'll be worse before they're better. But *you*—you'll be better for a good long stretch of years before you're worse. See if you can get it through her stupid head, Maud, what I mean!"

Mrs. Leroy slipped an affectionate arm around Delight, who stared from one to the other of them in a stupid way indeed. "Dear child, I think the

doctor means—he means that he thinks you are going to have a baby . . . Delight! ”

Delight swayed for a moment. She continued to stare from one to the other of them with horror-stricken eyes. Then she fled out of the room.

She could hear Mrs. Leroy's voice in horrified questioning of the doctor as she ran. She fled blindly downstairs and out to her refuge in the garden. She did not think of anybody or anything except that she had to hide, to be somewhere all alone, and face it—her amazing breach of faith. For this was how it seemed to her. Everything—the whole edifice of her life—had been built on the one fact—at the end of the year she would be dead or dying. . . . She was going to live—she was going to have a child!

“And I can't kill myself,” she said half aloud, piteously. “It wouldn't be fair to the baby.” Through all her terror a little wild thrill of rapture at the idea of a baby all her own went through her.

Possibility after possibility raced through her mind. None of them were any use. She sat half-crouched on the rustic bench, hidden behind the tall syringa-bushes, with her head on her arms, shuddering. . . . She couldn't kill herself. Then how could she free Julian and give him the money that

rightfully belonged to him? If she hid would it do any good? Was there any way of divorcing a woman because she had got you to marry her under false pretenses? . . . The sick horror of her own future life under these circumstances touched her consciousness but lightly. She knew it was there, but it did not have to be faced till after she had seen a way out for Julian. . . . He wouldn't want the baby, though, when it came. He was just a boy himself; it was ridiculous to think of him with a child. She would have that.

The possibilities and plans, each more futile than the other, went round in her head as if they were on the rim of a wheel. She could not tell how long she had been crouching there in her shaken misery, except that it seemed forever, when she felt a hand on her shoulder, and sprang aside in nervous fright.

"It's only Everett," he said. "Why, what's the matter, you poor child?"

She tried to speak, and with the effort the last bit of her self-control went, and she burst into tears.

"I'll—oh, Everett, I'm going to live!" she sobbed.

He looked at her in surprise, and then very nearly laughed.

"But that's splendid! Why, Delight, what more wonderful news could you have in the world?" he

said. "My dear, I don't know when I've been so happy!"

He caught both her hands and held them tight. She looked at his face, all alight with happiness, in dull surprise.

"Tell me about it? When did you find it out? Is it certain?" he demanded.

"It's the same doctor who said I couldn't live, before," she said listlessly. The family doctor Cousin Augusta had, a very well-known old man. Drake. You know of him."

"Yes—you told me, I remember, before. Oh, . Delight, how wonderful! You foolish child, it's upset you terribly. . . . My poor little girl, I don't suppose we've any of us realized what you've suffered with the idea hanging over your head. I may tell you now, I never more than half believed it."

She let her hands lie passively in his—indeed, she scarcely realized that he held them.

"But can't you see how terrible it is for poor Julian? I'm in honor bound to free him. I've been sitting here for ages, I think, trying and trying to think how. And I can't."

The most understanding and sympathetic of men is not able to understand a woman all the way through, especially when he is in love with her.

Everett was not to blame for thinking that if Delight's first thought was a wish to free Julian, she could not care for him very deeply. Whereas it was just because Delight did love him so entirely and unselfishly that she felt feverishly the wrong she had done him, and would have been willing to drop completely out of existence, if she could straighten things for him. But so few people are capable of that sort of feeling that it was no wonder Everett misunderstood.

He spoke again, very softly and quietly.

"Poor child—I see. But there's a way out, my dear girl. Didn't you know that?"


"No—what?" she demanded.

"Divorce."

"I've been thinking and thinking of that. But we haven't any cause. We—we've had a lovely time together. At least, *I* have."

"You child!" he said, his face softening. "What you have to do is to tell Julian that he can have a divorce. You can get it for desertion by leaving him—fortunately there's plenty of money to do it—if you are willing to wait a year; or if you feel it should be done more quickly, it can be arranged in New York so that you divorce him."

"How?" she asked.



He smiled.

"Leave that to the people who look after it for you. You don't need to bother with details."

"Would it be honest?" she asked.

"It's a choice of two evils, isn't it?" he asked. "You seemed to think that staying married to Julian would be the most dishonest thing you could do."

His answer seemed conclusive. She dropped her head.

"Only he mightn't feel that he ought to stop being married. You see he's so honorable. If it was only Edna I had to deal with it would be all right. She isn't honorable at all."

Everett smiled. He spoke more gently still.

"I can suggest something that might adjust even that."

"Well?" said Delight. Everything seemed suddenly dull and numb. It was better than the storm of feelings she had just been through. She hoped she could stay that way.

"If—" he was speaking very slowly, his eyes fixed on hers—"if you were to tell Julian that you, as well as he, wanted the divorce, because you, as well as he, wanted to marry someone else, you would

give him a self-respecting reason for accepting freedom."

"But I don't," said Delight. "It would be dreadful. There's . . ." She colored high, but Everett had grown to be almost like a confessor to her. "They think there's going to be—a baby."

She had spoken almost inaudibly.

She heard Everett gasp. After a moment he spoke again.

"Even so . . ."

"It isn't even so!" said Delight passionately. "It would be horrible to think of marrying anyone else, when I was going to have Julian's baby!"

Everett considered within himself that he would never make enough allowance for the primitive instincts of women. Here was Delight, as he honestly believed, not caring so very much for Julian, and ready to turn to him—had she not been turning to him for comfort for this whole month, as if she belonged to him? And yet the old instinct rose up in her way. Well, instincts were unreasonable things, and could be got over by the use of the reasoning mind. And Delight was reasonable. He did not realize that her affections as well as her instincts were on Julian's side.

"But if you want to free Julian you have to think of it," he said.

"But he'd find out it wasn't so."

"It would have to be so."

"What do you mean?"

"Would it be so hard to—after the baby had come, and was being taken care of by its grandmother, if you didn't want to look after it yourself—to marry me?"

By every law of possibility Delight should have known this was coming. But the fact remains that she did not. It was as much of a shock to her as if Everett had never told her he loved her. She had become so used to him in the rôle of—practically—a girl friend, that she sat back and stared at him, struck silent, as she always was by the unexpected.

He leaned forward and put his arm around her.

"My poor little child, you are going to live, and you say they don't want you—no one wants you. Well, I want you terribly. Give young Leroy his freedom, make over his aunt's money to him, let him marry the little Morse girl. Then come to me and be loved and wanted your whole life long."

She moved mechanically away from him. The numb feeling, after that one flash of passion over the baby, had come back again, and with it a feeling

of helplessness in the face of events. Perhaps he was right. . . . But how could she—how could she? She belonged to Julian. . . . But he did not really want her, good and loving as he had been to her. . . .

She looked up into Everett's face. He was very kind, and she liked him. She wished he would go away. She could do what he suggested so much better if he would go away. . . .

But she still felt the helplessness. She sat still and said nothing, and, encouraged by her silence, he went on talking, more impetuously than she had ever known him to.

"You were infatuated with Julian because he was the first man of your own age who had ever spoken to you. You've seen more of the world now. You . . ."

It was Julian's voice that broke in on what he was saying.

"Delight! Delight! " he called.

Delight sprang to her feet, her face flushing.

"I don't want to see him! I can't talk to him—or you—or anybody. Go now, please, Everett. . . ."

But before Everett could go, or Delight slip away in the other direction, Julian was swiftly on them.

He looked neither to the right nor the left. He paid no more attention to Everett Stevenson than if he had been one of the bushes. He caught Delight in his arms, laughing and exultant, and kissed her as he had never kissed her before.

"Oh, my darling, my darling!" she heard him saying. "Isn't it wonderful? Didn't I tell you so? Didn't I have a brilliant idea, sickening old Drake on you? You poor little thing—you poor little darling—you'll never have that horrible thing hanging over you again . . ."

He was glad! He was happy about it! But—he couldn't be . . .

She clung to him, for a moment, instinctively.

"But—Edna?" she managed to whisper, nearly dazed.

"Oh, damn Edna!" said Julian heartily between two more kisses.

Delight remembered Everett then, and turned to see if he were still there. Julian turned, too, conscious for the first time of another presence.

He still kept an arm around Delight, and, out of his happiness, spoke joyously to the other man.

"What do you think, Stevenson—this poor plucky little thing has been thinking for nearly a year now that she was dying of pernicious anemia! I'd

like to shoot old Drake for doing it to you, dearest! And she's been going on, and getting just as much happiness out of life for herself and everybody else, as she possibly could. What do you think of that for bravery? I didn't much believe it after the first—but she'd been looking pulled down lately, so I was worried enough to get the doctor for her. I hadn't before, because I thought I'd persuaded her that it was all nonsense. And it *is* all nonsense! ”

He tightened his hold on Delight, still half laughing with relief and pleasure.

“And—oh, hang it, Stevenson, be a good sport and go home! We want to have it out alone.”

“I—am very glad for you both,” said Stevenson very quietly. He smiled at them both, as they stood interlaced, and turned and went.

“He *is* a good sport,” said Delight half under her breath. But she never told Julian what she meant.

He turned to her again, and pulled her close to him. In this position, even while kissing her, he managed to give her a little shake.

“And now, Delight Leroy, if you even say ‘but Edna ’ again as long as we both shall live—you, with a husband that adores you, and a baby coming that's going to worship the ground you walk on—oh, isn't it splendid, you darling?—If you ever do . . .”

"Well, if I ever do—what?" said Delight, laughing too with that quick transition to gaiety that Julian's gaiety could always give her.

"Well, if you ever do, you're a worse little idiot than you ever were to believe old Drake. Come on in the house. Drake said you ought to rest."

"But if I hadn't believed in him," said Delight contemplatively, as she went back to the house, with Julian's arm still about her—he seemed afraid to let go of her for a moment—"if I hadn't believed in him probably none of this would ever have happened. . . . Julian—I was so shameless. . . ."

"Be quiet!" said Julian firmly. "You simply showed more sense than most people have the pluck to show. Don't ever worry about any of that. It's my belief that I was in love with you from the minute we met, only I didn't know it. I never forgot you for a moment. And didn't I jump at the chance of coming out and staying with you to build your toy theater out there? Delight, from start to finish you did things that only a super-sensible person would know how to do. And if it was all owing to old Drake's mistaken diagnosis, I'm almost willing to forgive him. Come on into the house now, Mother and Dora and Drake are lined up waiting to fall on your neck."

"And so I'm going to have year-after-next after all," she said dreamily, pausing a little in the golden October sunshine.

"You are indeed," he said. "But meanwhile, what is the matter with this particular year? I think it's just about the best little old year I ever saw."

"It is! Oh, it is!" said Delight, laughing happily back to him. "Julian—you don't know how beautiful it is—to be able to live in Now."

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